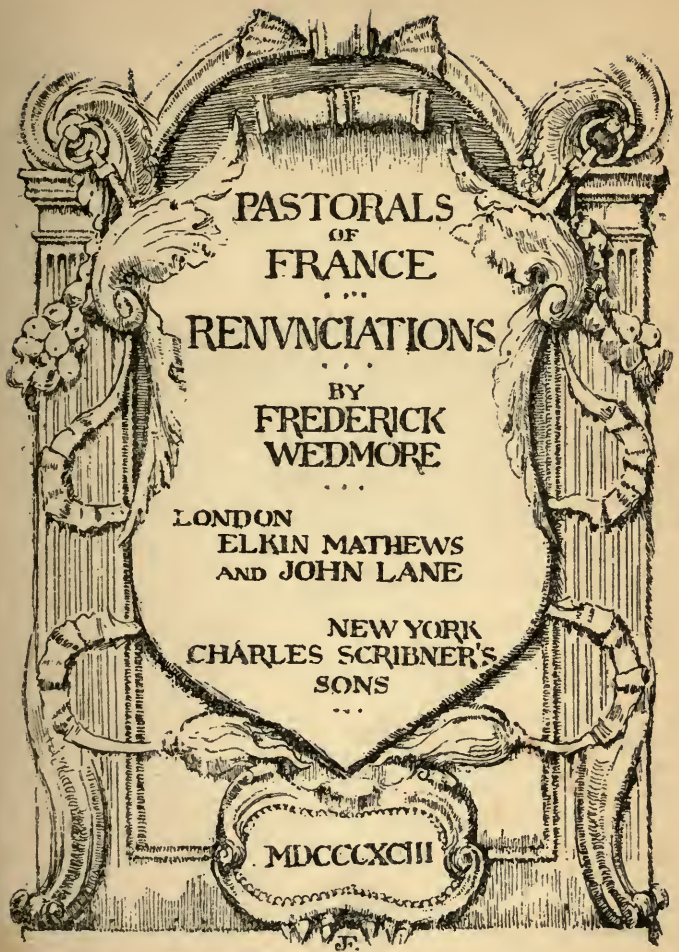
PASTORALS
OF
FRANCE
RENVNCIATIONS


PASTORALS
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FRANCE
RENVNCIATIONS
BY
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October 1893.

Dedication

MILLICENT

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Mr Rutterby had come by diligence from Paimbœuf. There was no traveller but himself, so they had used the 'supplement.' The 'supplement' was like a phaeton, with back-seat always covered by its head. Mr Rutterby had sat in the back of the supplement, and the blue-bloused driver of it had sat in front. The blue-bloused driver had held the reins loosely—the horses were steady, and knew their road over the hill from Paimbœuf to Saint Père-en-Retz, and on from Saint Père-en-Retz to Pornic by the sea—and he had leant back half the way to talk to the one traveller ; and as Mr Rutterby was quiet and reserved, the driver had chattered at will. Before the Bay of Biscay came in sight —or the little blue bay, out of the Bay of Biscay, round which Pornic rises—Mr Rutterby could have passed a creditable examination in his

charioteer's history, but the charioteer knew nothing of Mr Rutterby.

At last, however—having exhausted conversation on his own affairs—he turned his attention to the passenger's.

'Do you go to Pornic to amuse yourself, or to be a gentleman's valet?'

'Not to be a gentleman's valet,' said Mr Rutterby, with a quiet smile at the corners of his mouth. He wore a shabby overcoat; he was faithful to an old portmanteau; and he had an income of seven thousand a year.

'Then you go to amuse yourself? You cannot amuse yourself at Pornic. There is no theatre, no billiard-table—no pretty women. Aha! It is at Nantes that you can amuse yourself. Nantes! What a city! *La grande ville. Ma foi!*—an inconceivable city. But Pornic!—you have made a mistake.'

'I am going on a visit to Monsieur de Malmy,' said Philip Rutterby.

'Monsieur de Malmy!' said the driver. De Malmy, though not rich, was a man of social importance—and the driver was no longer a comrade. That air of companionship and brotherly equality is welcome to travellers who hate gratuities and desire information. With it,

a gratuity is impossible, for a gratuity implies inequality. The driver was no longer sociable. At the top of the hill he was Mr Rutterby's brother, at the bottom he was Mr Rutterby's servant.

This was Pornic, if Monsieur pleased. If Monsieur pleased, it might be anything else.

At last the diligence drove up to the yellow-white inn, and rattled into its courtyard roofed with vines. From the housetop on one side to the housetop on the other, this green roof stretched over the paved courtyard, a sunny canopy, yet protecting the yard from a heat too fierce. 'It is like an echo of Italy,' thought Mr Rutterby, as he stepped slowly down from the 'supplement,' and Monsieur de Malmy kissed him on his cheek.

Then visitor and host got into the host's pony-carriage, and drove out to Saint-Marie, where the Frenchman had a *chalet* every year for the bathing season.

'And your son and daughter?' asked Mr Rutterby, inquiring for them directly he had been assured that Madame de Malmy was well.

'Alas! dear friend, my son continues to disturb me. Léon's expenditure is on the scale

of a millionaire's. I am a weak man to allow it, for it cripples me very much. Ondelette, too, must suffer for it. It will reduce her dowry; and the poor girl's dowry is small enough already. She has little but beauty and a name.'

'Well, that is much,' said Mr Rutterby pleasantly.

'"Little"—you mean—in the age in which we live. But never mind, never mind! I am not anxious to marry Ondelette. Ondelette is young, and can wait. It will satisfy me for her to be always with us. I should miss her here—miss her much more at Angers. I cannot play Bach's preludes for myself. She must stay to play them to me, I suppose.'

And now they were in front of the full sea. The castle, and the little bay, and the many-shuttered town rising tall on the hill side, were left behind. They drove along the main road, out to Saint-Marie, past villas and *chalets* set in pleasant gardens, where silvery grass-plants grew a dozen feet high, and rose-tree and lavender, petunia and geranium, vine, acacia and fig-tree, flourished together in that genial sunshine and soft air of autumn afternoon.

'The Bay of Biscay is placid enough to-day,'

said Mr Rutterby. But the summer lingers, his friend could have told him, and gives place only suddenly to winter and storm.

But here was the particular *chalet* which was home for the present—a creeper-covered cottage, with pretty front, *bizarre* and individual, like all the rest in the long and varied row set in their gardens along the mile of peopled and cultivated coast from Pornic to Saint-Marie. A glass door from the garden led straight into the little *salon*, and there sat Ondelette.

She had just come in with a basket of blackberries, which grow in Pornic hedges big and rich as mulberries.

'We will have them for dessert,' said Ondelette. 'You must not neglect them—my blackberries. They all came out of the lane leading to the Druids' Stones, papa. We must take Mr Rutterby to see the Druids' Stones. Oh! but he doesn't care for anything except Art—I forgot. Whatever can you find to do at Pornic?'

'You shall take me to see the Druidical remains, Ondelette,' said Mr Rutterby. He called her by her Christian name because he was her father's friend. He remembered the day when he had congratulated her father on her birth.

He was thirty-five years her senior, for she was nineteen and he was four-and-fifty.

'Thank you,' she said: 'that will be for to-morrow. It will be a pleasant walk, at all events. The stones stand high on neglected ground. There are legends about them, and terrors. But I don't myself care for legends and terrors; I assure you I prefer this dear little sunny garden of a Pornic. It is all one garden, in the eye of the sun—from Pornic to Saint-Marie.'

'It looks like a revival of Eden, I fancy,' Mr Rutterby observed.

'With better gardening,' said Ondelette, 'for Adam was but a beginner. He would never have despised our Pornic and Saint-Marie.'

She had not seen the new guest for five years, and was very young, inexperienced, and child-like, but was as free with him—as much at home in a moment—as any woman could have been, were she accustomed to have a dinner-party twice a week in London, and to say suitable nothings to half the world every night of the season. For Ondelette lived a free family life, quiet and intimate, whether at Angers or Pornic. Few indeed were admitted to her home; but whoever was admitted, was at once

a friend. When Mr Rutterby went upstairs to dress himself for dinner, he carried with him the impression of her frank simplicity, and thought that he had seen a comely picture in seeing her sun-browned cheeks, her large brown eyes, very soft, over-shadowed with shining hair, the colour of deep gold. Philip Rutterby knew the old French poetry, and remembered that Ondelette was of the type that Ronsard loved—seen most in the green sunny country of Anjou—*la petite pucelle Angevine.*

The little dining-room looked pleasant in the evening, with its dark buffet and deep grey wall-paper, and the lamp hung from the ceiling —throwing a bright light on the table, where silver glittered and fine glass was clear, and Ondelette's blackberries had the place of honour, and were duly flanked by blue plates with greyish-red chrysanthemums.

'It is early to make a show of your chrysanthemums,' said Mr Rutterby, 'for to-morrow is but the first day of October. But your instinct of colour is exquisite, Ondelette.'

'Thank you,' said Ondelette. 'The chrysanthemums cannot come soon enough, nor stay long enough. They are my favourite flowers. O ! but that is a poor word—"*favourite*" flowers.

They are more than that. But perhaps it's too early in the year for you to value them. They are best in their own time, after all—when the earth is gloomy, whichever way you look. In November they come like cheerfulness in winter, but always very sober—delightfully sober—like a friend who comes in your trouble.'

'What is your "trouble," Ondelette?' asked Madame de Malmy.

'*My* trouble! Oh! I have no trouble. Perhaps I should not like these sad, dear, sober things, if I had. There! lie as I put you. He *will* sink down below the rest. He is so modest—his stem is not long enough. He doesn't assert himself—that chrysanthemum. He will never get on in the world.'

Philip Rutterby smiled.

'You have come to a foolish place,' said Ondelette. 'We talk nothing but nonsense at Pornic. It is such a *pleasant* place, there is no need to be wise in it.'

'But we want to hear about your acquisitions, my dear friend,' said De Malmy, with genuine consideration for his friend, as well as with the common worldly-wise knowledge that you please a man most by talking about his own affairs.

'What have you been picking up lately, since I was with you in London?'

One of Rutterby's few pleasures was to talk about Art: so he answered readily, 'You know Crome? The chief painter of the Norwich landscape school, you remember. Unless, indeed, Cotman—'

'Even *I*, in France, know Crome,' said Ondelette. 'Have you got a picture of his, Mr Rutterby?'

'Two or three,' he answered, glad that she cared to listen. 'I have had them for several years on my dining-room wall. But it is a little water-colour I was going to speak of to your father. I had one home the day before I came away. It is not at all a "taking" drawing. But you must have what you can get of Crome, I fancy, in water-colour. He is difficult to meet with in water-colour; and when met with, perhaps more interesting than valuable. Perhaps he was not at his ease in water-colour —a little hard and dry, generally, I daresay; but there are shivering, grey willows in the background of this drawing which have the same masterhand in them, unmistakably, as the great willow picture which is still in Norfolk. The French were right, I believe, in ranking

Crome high. Ondelette, do you draw in water-colours?'

'Ondelette obtained a certificate from the teacher at the Convent,' her mother informed Mr Rutterby, with pride.

'But Sister Claire was almost as partial to me as Reverend Mother herself,' said the girl. 'I know it was not fair of her, though I *did* try my best. And if I *had* deserved the certificate, it wouldn't have been much. I ought indeed to be able to draw and play, being such a wretched little housekeeper.'

'You tell us the truth, Mademoiselle,' her father said, gently pulling the tip of her ear. 'As long as you stay at home with us, and have your mother to fall back upon' — a graceful concession on De Malmy's part to the claims of Madame de Malmy—'your faults in this matter may be overlooked; but the day on which I put on my hat, little girl, to go out and look for a son-in-law, I shall have to remember what a child you are in these matters. You would be at the mercy of your servants, Ondelette.'

'Then I would have *good* servants, and should like to be at their mercy. But that will not be for a *very* long while.'

'Ondelette allows herself to say silly things,' remarked her mother, in an explanatory way. .

'She has a very pretty talent as an artist,' her father added, to Mr Rutterby. Ondelette was used to be spoken of frankly, and these chance phrases of slight praise or blame wrought no change in her look and manner—a look and manner of much peace, breaking now and again into merriment, as when summer lightning breaks across a placid summer sky.

'Do you keep to your habit of walking after dinner?' asked Monsieur de Malmy of his guest.

'Except in winter,' said Philip Rutterby. 'Then I enjoy my own "interior" as best I can—looking over my portfolios, in my chair by the fire, like the self-centred bachelor that I am.'

'Do you like interiors?' asked Ondelette; 'for if you do I will show you some pretty ones in Pornic. I will take you a walk, some evening, after dark.'

'There is no one to mind in Pornic,' interpolated Madame de Malmy.

'Last year, when papa was less busy, he and I used to go our rounds after dark very often.

I have hardly been at all this year. Papa is working so hard at his learned pamphlet, you know—all about the castle of Plessis-les-Tours. But I tell papa your Walter Scott has been before him in that.'

'Sir Walter wrote a novel, and would have been the last person to think he had anticipated my monograph,' answered the man of learned leisure. 'Give us some music, my child, and place for my friend Rutterby the cosiest chair in the salon. Even your enthusiasm can hardly propose to lead him forth to-night. Ah! that is right,' he added, passing into the little salon and seeing with satisfaction the cheerful light of the wood fire—flickering, sober, and low; 'to-morrow is the first of October. The nights freshen, *ma fille*.'

'No lamp, De Malmy—no lamp, unless you *wish* it. It would quite spoil the charm, I fancy. I have no doubt Ondelette can play without any further light, and the effect of the "interior" is too pretty a one to spoil.' And Rutterby sat down, as he was bidden, in the cosiest chair—a bachelor, when once past forty, takes the cosiest chair without even knowing it—and De Malmy sat on the other side of the fire, and his wife between, and the firelight flickered on Ondelette's

hair and cheek, as she sat down to the little straight black piano.

'In my house I have no use for a piano,' said Philip Rutterby, rather sadly. (For he was often a calmly melancholy man, of much timidity, and he never sought to hide the expression of his temperament.) 'But if I had a piano, it should be a plain straight box, like your French ones, and not spoilt by our meaningless curves and vicious ornaments. A piano, De Malmy, is a *cabinet for music*, and that is simply what it ought to look like. The spinnet was really the better-shaped instrument, painted in quiet tints, sage greens and yellow browns, as in a picture I have, by Van der Meer of Delft.'

'Shall you listen, do you think?' asked Ondelette, quite frankly.

'Why, of *course*,' answered Rutterby.

'I asked, because, if people listen, they deserve to know what they are listening to. I am going to play a prelude of Bach's first; then a *fugue* that does not belong to it.'

She played. He listened and looked. She stopped. He asked her to repeat it. She played the two again, without even glancing round by way of answer to his request. And when the two were finished once more—an affair of only

five minutes—there was nothing said directly; and before the silence broke, Ondelette had struck the full, deep chords once more, and for the third time they heard that music's passionate undertone.

'Then you like Bach?' she said to Mr Rutterby, now turning round from the piano, very happy and satisfied. 'The man who wrote that prelude must have felt something deeply. I wonder what it was?' said Ondelette.

'You should play something else,' said Madame de Malmy. 'One wearies of the same thing.'

'I never get tired of the sea in autumn, and its long, low roll, out here, that never stops. Why should one be tired of Sebastian Bach, at a third hearing? Eh, papa?'

It was to her father she appealed. And she knelt down by him, and put her hand in his arm, and looked into the fire, broodingly, quietly. Madame de Malmy rang for the lamp, and began to scan the pages of the 'Figaro.'

'And the monograph on Plessis-les-Tours?' asked Philip Rutterby, of his friend: 'Don't let me interfere with your evening occupations.'

'I have nothing to do this evening but to write two words to an English archæologist,

acknowledging the receipt of a remarkable paper on "The Use of the word *Pig*, in its connection with *Pig Cross*." Then we will talk again, dear friend, and hear more of your acquisitions.'

'Have you long been a collector?' inquired Madame de Malmy, with civil but languid interest.

'A matter of twenty years, dear Madam,' Rutterby answered. 'You see I have neither chick nor child, nor any relation. My little fortune has always been more than enough for my own needs, and men as ignorant of the world as I am do not know how to be charitable wisely to anyone but themselves. So I have a good many things by this time—not of much value to others, I daresay—but I admire them myself. Moreover, I think one does some good, in guarding reverently, beautiful things.'

He always spoke of his collection modestly, but it had been brought together with the finest taste, and as to its money value, it was the result of an annual outlay of several thousands, continued now for twenty years. Experts, who had seen it, were right in judging that altogether it had cost a hundred thousand pounds, and would fetch double that money.

When Philip Rutterby went up to bed, his

thoughts were full of Ondelette. A bachelor of fifty-four, in indifferent health, is particular about the disposition of his chamber, and the set of its blinds and window curtains. He does not sleep immediately in a fresh room. The fresh room breaks in a little upon his familiar ways. So Rutterby had time to think of Ondelette. Her beauty had impressed him, and he had been at home with it—generally the beauty he saw was only that which passed him by chance in the street. There was such simplicity, too, with the beauty, and with these the poetry of girl-nature never suppressed—child-nature, perhaps; hardly a woman's yet. 'Were I a young man,' thought Philip Rutterby, 'I suppose I should fall in love with her to-day or to-morrow. But for me, that is all past—all past,' he muttered to himself. He had had his passion in his youth, and had been constant to it.

And yet not quite 'in his youth,' for his youth had had its lighter loves—'blazes,' Polonius said, 'giving more light than heat, you must not take for fire.' These mild thin blazes of a mild quiet temperament subsided soon, and at thirty an old friendship glowed into love, and he looked forward to happiness. The girl—a city parson's

daughter—fell suddenly ill. The marriage had to be postponed, while she wintered abroad. She came back stronger, and the marriage day was fixed upon. But she was ill again, and was hurried to the South—to Hyères—whither Philip Rutterby followed her. The new illness was a short one. She died one bright November morning, within sight of the Mediterranean. They buried her under a row of cypresses that bowed lightly over her with every wind from the mountains. These things were very deep in Rutterby's heart, and for two-and-twenty years he had been faithful to that memory.

But, of course, in two-and-twenty years, a structure wrought of many associations and many days had arisen and spread itself over the older memory, so that the older memory was like some verses learnt in childhood, recalled now and again, but not for service, or even pleasure, in the present life — the so-different, ever-changing present life, with the common thoughts and common needs of which this poor dead far-away Past has nothing to do. To many, when it does come up, that older memory is like an attenuated ghost—unreal beside the gross, tangible presences of our vulgar days.

But there was nothing gross, indeed—nothing

vulgar, indeed—in Ondelette and her environments. It seemed like a new poem, the bright and placid experience of the last few hours, to Rutterby. There was the sunny, unfamiliar country; the brown peasants, merry amidst their rich lands, still almost in their yielding time; there was the quaint, tall, many-shuttered town, with narrow house fronts one above the other, and hanging gardens, and small castle jutting out where the sinuous, shallow river passed into the little blue bay; there was the deep blue bay which, as you followed with keenest eye the track of its water, became somehow invisibly all one with the great outer sea. Then there had been the pleasant sight of ordered villa and *chalet*, with luxuriant garden; the cottage-villa, which was home for a while; the cosy lights and glooms of its chambers, full of objects which spoke to Rutterby of gentle life, its joys and busyness—the music—Ondelette. Yes—Ondelette.

All this produced a pleasant wakefulness. You remember Goethe when he was at Marienbad—the summer holiday, the encounter with one forgets what German Fräulein, the stirred pulses, the half-recognised longings—and the poet was seventy-four. Philip Rutterby was twenty years

younger; but no poet, you may say. No, indeed, there was little power of expression—much reticence and timid reserve—about that lonely man, whose pictures were his friends, and whose hermitage was in the heart of London.

Ondelette was in high spirits next morning, at the ten o'clock breakfast; flushed with the salt-sea bath, and the walk after it along the gleaming morning coast, sparkling with sunshine. Philip Rutterby looked at her from under his thin iron-grey eyebrows, with the quiet, steadfast examining eyes of the connoisseur of Art—eyes accustomed to the peaceful contemplation of beautiful things. De Malmy noticed how closely he looked at her. Presently, when the meal was over, host and guest marched out to the beach—the beach of La Noveillard, whose sands are washed by open sea; more timid bathers bathe in the little bay by the castle, right under Pornic town; but La Noveillard was always the choice of De Malmy, who was now only too glad to spend the best hours of the day there with his friend, and watch the sunlight steal along the coast, lighting up villa and villa-garden, and the rising ground of brown ploughed land beyond, dotted with grey farms here and there, now rosy with late afternoon,

and then look out to the clear sky and infinite sea, and in the far horizon the dark line of coast —the long dark streak of Isle Noirmoutier.

'You find her very beautiful—my Ondelette?' said De Malmy, when they had watched the afternoon bathers, and when he saw that Rutterby was no more minded than himself to read the English newspaper which they had brought out lest talk should flag.

Philip Rutterby did not often express admiration in strong words, and when he said quietly, 'I should think Ondelette a genius of happiness,' the phrase meant much with him.

'I have not judged it convenient to mention to her that I have just received a proposal of marriage. The young man himself takes the initiative, by writing me a letter which I have received this morning. He is called Jules Gérard—a young man of some little talent—*sous-préfet* of Saumur. Only twenty-eight years of age. I suppose he wishes to marry himself into a premature reputation for steadiness.'

'What does Ondelette think of him?' asked Philip Rutterby, rather nervously.

'Ondelette, dear friend, thinks well of him, of course; for I have not educated Ondelette to think ill of anybody. My child is as naïve as

your Shakspere's "Miranda." Besides, she is impulsive and sympathetic. She is your true friend—Ondelette—when you have talked to her quietly for a quarter of an hour.'

'I have not done so,' remarked Philip Rutterby. 'And this young man—does he know her well?'

'*Mon Dieu!* if my child is your friend in a quarter of an hour, that is because you can know her in that time. Ondelette is excellent. I would not make a mere *mariage de convenance* for her.'

'There should be fine uses for so fine an instrument,' said Philip Rutterby, broodingly, and in a low voice from under his thin grey moustache.

'But I cannot regard a *sous-préfecture* as an adequate provision,' De Malmy observed.

'She does not love him, then?' asked Rutterby.

'Romantic fellow! You forget of whom you speak. She is French—*ma fille—et bien élevée.* Of *course* she does not love him. . . . Well, well, Rutterby, dear friend, we cannot settle it out here this afternoon. Let us go in. They will have come back from their drive. . . . I will consider at leisure Monsieur Gérard's pretensions.'

'And what will Madame de Malmy think of

them?' asked Rutterby, rising from the low beach seat.

'She will think them unjustified. But what of that? It is I who must decide, without prejudice or influence. I have never yet taken counsel of women—especially middle-aged women. Oh! *les femmes, les femmes!—ça ne vaut pas grand' chose!*'

Ondelette and her mother had come in from their afternoon drive, when Rutterby and De Malmy re-entered the villa. And again to-day there was yesterday's pleasure of the cosy dining-room and lamp-lit *salon* afterwards. Philip Rutterby was again in his armchair, and was looking at Ondelette.

'Are you tired, Mr Rutterby?' said Ondelette. 'I will play us all some music, if you are.'

'Will you take your promised walk with me?—your old evening round,' Rutterby made answer.

'That is what I was longing for,' said the girl, with glistening eyes. These young eyes, thought Philip Rutterby, can glisten with so small a pleasure.

Her hat and shawl were on her in a minute.

'Do not allow our child to tire you,' said Madame de Malmy, who thought proper, in the

interests of respectability, and of her own age, to insist upon the childhood of Ondelette.

'Ondelette is not accustomed to make herself a burden,' murmured her father, in his jealous regard for her And he went out to the gate, and followed with his eyes the vanishing figures of his daughter and his friend.

She had put her hand at once, unasked, in Rutterby's arm, so very confidingly, never thinking that his arm was not so much her own as was her father's.

'If he were only ten years younger!' thought De Malmy, going in, 'she would be very comfortably provided for. Even now —'

'Now what sort of a house is yours?' asked Ondelette boldly, after two minutes of silence, for Rutterby did not begin a conversation. 'I want so much to realise England—I have only read of it in books.'

'A small house, in a quiet street, just out of a London square. There is nothing to notice in the old house, except my pictures.'

'Have you any pictures by artists I know about? Oh! yes—there was Crome—I forgot.'

'The landscape painter, Corot—he alone among living men. Most modern artists are

too much for me, Ondelette. I am of the old school, and like the old things best.'

'What else, then, Mr Rutterby? What is it right to like—if you must always like wisely—among prints for instance? Prints—now tell me!'

'You may always like Turner's "Liber Studiorum." Then I have a few of Rembrandt's etchings, and some prints of Marc Antonio's. Some Dürer's, Beham's. Jacopo di Barbarj's too. And most of Mantegna's prints I am fortunate enough to possess. That is, fortunate, if my own taste is a right one. These great men who are dead, could be vigorous without being violent. I should like to show you one of Rembrandt's landscapes—his most exquisite one.'

'Is it very beautiful?' she asked.

'I think so. But much depends on the impression. My own impression of this happens to be fine. And yet it cost me less than sixty pounds, I recollect.'

'And are these on the walls?'

'I keep them in a portfolio—the score or so of Rembrandt's etchings that I happen to have. My room is an old panelled room, less cheerful than your villa, but cheerful at night, and so still that I can hear the tick of the insect in my tapestry, on the further wall, facing the

windows, where I like the effect of tapestry, as that is a bad light for pictures. There is Flemish tapestry of the fifteenth century, and some Italian of the thirteenth.'

'You must be very happy with all your pictures, over there in London,' the girl said.

'You cannot buy happiness by buying pictures, Ondelette,' answered Mr Rutterby, gently. They had got into the little town now.

The town leads such an open life, that you can see it all as you pass along its short and narrow irregular streets, from the little yellow-washed Hôtel de France, with its vine-covered court, in which the heavy diligence stands waiting for to-morrow, on to the slender Thirteenth Century church, with the café by the side of it, and so down hill a little, past the hospital chapel, over whose door, in a scant pent-house shrine, Our Lady of Good Succour stands to watch over the port, and so on a little to where the three roads meet and the bridge joins the quiet quay, and the lazy river water laps the stonework, and little lights gleam from detached cottages that stand back from the port, and the masts of yacht and fishing-smack rise like a company of darkened spears against the clear night sky.

That was the evening round which Ondelette took Philip Rutterby, and they glanced through many a window as they passed, for the Pornic people keep their shutters for the sun, and never trouble in the evening to shut out from view such simple 'interiors' as their rooms present; and no one, but here and there a passing stranger, cares, as he walks, to take any heed of the sight of such familiar homes. Here was a tiny closet-like kitchen, with the fire burning low, and a woman setting things in order after the day's work, and a child sitting up at a high kitchen-table, munching its supper. 'She will put him to bed in a few minutes. A creature of red fat legs—of dawning intelligence and developed appetite,' explained Ondelette, whereat Philip Rutterby smiled happily. It was new to him to have these pleasant little nothings said to him confidentially.

They passed a small room where a grey-haired woman sat as one waiting, and a high-capped servant-girl had brought the last things for the evening meal. 'She is waiting for her son,' said Ondelette. 'He works late in his study—a notary, I suppose. Mother and son, you see. Mothers are always devoted to their sons. Mamma dotes upon Léon,' said Ondelette

innocently. 'Indeed, he was quite my own ideal, until he spent so much of papa's money. I love him very much—dear silly boy!'

Then they passed a darkened shop-front, and saw that inside only one candle lighted the family there. A small round table had been drawn out into the shop, and the candle stood on it, and on the three straight little chairs sat mother and two daughters busily at work. One snaps a thread, another reaches the big scissors, and a third looks up and laughs at some light chatter that beguiles their toil. 'They are very merry in each other's company,' said Philip Rutterby. 'I sit alone of an evening myself, while my servants, in their servants' parlour underneath, laugh at their own jokes as merrily as these good stocking-menders here. I shall be sorry, Ondelette, when I go back from Pornic.'

They made their way along the high road, following the coast, and the little salon clock struck ten as they got inside from the dark garden to the lamp-lit villa, and by that time all Pornic slept, save the few hospital watchers and the one constable trudging his rounds. Small taverns were closed, *chalets* were shut, the high road out to Saint-Marie deserted for

the night; but clouds out of the west had drifted up over the stars, and a wind had risen, and there was a deeper roll of dark grey sea along the shore. 'The weather breaks to-night,' Ondelette said, with her hand in Philip Rutterby's dry palm for good-bye. 'The rainy time has come—our autumn in Anjou. But here it was summer to-day, and will be winter to-morrow.'

Philip Rutterby went upstairs, and rested a minute at a still open window. The tall thin spire of Saint-Marie stood out even now against a space of yet unclouded sky, and, in the evening dark, the land had something of the sea's significance. He looked right and left along the coast—was somehow strangely touched by that quick change that she had prophesied. 'It might have waited a day or two, and when it came, come sympathetically,' he half thought to himself; 'for anyhow it will be winter indeed with me when I go back, and away from her.' And as imagination followed the infinite line of sea-board, to fair city and populous port and open country, out there, leagues away in the dark, he wondered where, in all that guessed-at country, undiscovered by his eye, there was any heart as lonely as his, just now—any life that

seemed so rich and prosperous, and was so yearning and so hungry. He closed the window, and drew its curtains, and shut out that thought. 'A mere passing fancy,' he said to himself. 'Utterly idle—hopelessly idle!' She might even marry him, he imagined, loving no other; but if she did, how little time would pass before she must be sorry for her choice, in the gradual perception of his failing health and advancing age, and in the rising of some unsatisfied need! And he? Why, of course, it was a dreamer's dream, and had vanished even now.

It rained hard all next morning, and Monsieur de Malmy was occupied with his monograph on Plessis-les-Tours. But at last he sent a message to his old friend Rutterby, and Rutterby joined him in the room used as his study. 'You look but poorly, Rutterby, this morning. Ondelette must, after all, have taken you too long a walk last night.'

'No, no. But several money matters kept me awake last night.'

De Malmy lifted his eyebrows in surprise. '*You!*—money matters.'

'Why, yes,' rejoined Rutterby; 'I fancy the possession of money is often as great a tax on a man's peace as the lack of it.'

'Tell that to the gardener out there, who works for me at two francs a day. Poor devil! —I can't afford to give him any more, Rutterby.'

'Casimir Delavigne is perhaps by no means a great poet,' Philip Rutterby resumed, 'but there are three lines in his "Louis the Eleventh" which struck me very much this morning: lonely wretch that I am!'

'That is a strong word from you, my friend —"lonely wretch," indeed! What are the lines?'

'These are the lines:—

'"Après la danse, au fond de sa chaumière,
Le plus pauvre d'entre eux va rentrer en chantant;
Ah! l'heureux misérable! un doux sommeil l'attend;
Il va dormir; *et moi*—"

They mean much or little to you, according as you take them. To me they mean very much, De Malmy. They sum up all the weariness of Louis Onze.'

'You should have left the spleen in England,' said De Malmy, lightly. '*Eh bien!* I have been weighing the pretensions of this young man, Jules Gérard. Here is his photograph.'

'He did not give it to Ondelette?' asked Philip Rutterby, almost as if alarmed.

'I should think *not*, indeed! He insisted, however, upon giving it to Madame de Malmy, who values it even less than Ondelette or I would do. For myself, I think he is a very honourable young fellow. He has a good heart. He has good intelligence. He will go very far —this young man—you understand my idiom. Madame de Malmy does not attach enough importance to his future. She asks only for present position—the result *attained*—in a son-in-law. But we must not be influenced by women in these matters. Women do not count for very much—unless they happen to be Ondelettes. I am myself inclined to have the young man on a visit, and while you are here —immediately. For though you are no man of the world, you are a close observer, nevertheless.'

Philip Rutterby was silent; and De Malmy continued.

'It is true the young man is not as well-to-do, at present, as I should have liked. What is a *sous-préfecture?* Four hundred a year, and the obligation to feed several score of discontented local people, once or twice a twelvemonth, in order to report to head-quarters what is the spirit of your population. . . . But Saumur is

very near to Angers, I must remember. And then, again, the little private fortune of Jules Gérard is equal to that of Ondelette. I shall still scrape together a dowry of seventy-five thousand francs, if we like Gérard better, on further acquaintance.'

'I shall *not* like Gérard,' said Philip Rutterby, quietly, looking out of the window, and passing his thin hand over his thin iron-grey hair.

'And why?'

'Because I like Ondelette too well. . . . But this deluge will never stop, De Malmy!' he said, with quite a new impatience, turning round and leaving the room.

'Excellent man!' ejaculated De Malmy to himself. 'I am not sure now but that he will propose to marry her. He is not quite as young as he might be. But what does that matter, nowadays, when science has added ten years to the average of life? Nelaton and Corvisart can keep a man going pretty long. The science of patching people up has been carried very far. And then there is no devotion like that of a man who is getting well past middle-age, and has been stranded from the sea of passions—into which, however, *ce bon Rutterby* was never thrown, I am sure.'

Philip Rutterby went back into the salon with a book. An hour passed, and Ondelette came in. 'See! It is clearing,' said Ondelette, 'and you want a walk, I am sure. You look rather miserable, you know. Papa can lend you a waterproof, if you think it will rain again. I will go and put on my thick boots, and we will march away to the Druid monument. Papa never walks out in the wet. I walk alone generally at Pornic. See, there is the sun! These gravelly lanes about here soon dry up, with the strong west wind.'

Of course he was pleased enough. So out they walked again together; a thin, wiry, anxious man, with quiet contemplative eyes; and a blooming girl, all brown and gold-coloured with the warmth of a land near the sun and the health-bearing sea. The blackberry hedges, glistening after the morning rain, as they walked along the lanes, were not fresher than Ondelette.

She had to talk, for Philip Rutterby was silent; but she did not notice his silence, and prattled on about Pornic and Angers, the points of view here on the upland by the sea, the little old château at Angers, her brother Léon, who was 'learning his law' in Paris. 'If he were wise,' she said, he would persevere to take it

up professionally; not as a becoming accomplishment, but as the business of his life. 'For my brother is not *only* extravagant you must know, Mr Rutterby: he is very good-natured and clever besides. He is easily influenced, indeed; except by me, who am young, and by papa who is indulgent, and by mamma, who dotes upon him so.'

'Which seems a very pretty way of saying, Ondelette, that he is only capable of being influenced for the bad,' responded Mr Rutterby, with a faint, hopeless smile, which in a bolder man one would have called slightly satirical.

'No. Léon is much better than that. All depends upon the people he is with. Here, early in the season, he saw something of Monsieur Gérard, who did him good for the time. I think I should like my brother to live always with Monsieur Gérard. I do not know him very well, but it seems to me just this—that I should make him the hero of a story-book, if I ever wrote one.'

Rutterby made no comment, and there was silence for a minute or two. Ondelette had to begin again. 'You thought that very foolish, I see by your face; and so it was indeed, for what can we girls know about men, till we are

married and quite in the world? Supposing I were married to Monsieur Gérard, for instance — only I am too insignificant — no doubt I should find out that he had his faults. . . . Well, but a good man with faults would be only a hero in life, instead of a hero in a story book. Papa, now, has his faults. You, if I only knew you long enough—a certain *tristesse* is what I should complain about in you. . . . Ah! now I remember one fault which would be enough to dethrone him from my story book—he does not care at all for music. Fancy such a thing!'

'I *adore* music,' said Philip Rutterby, scarcely knowing why he spoke so strongly.

'Here is the common, high over the sea, and here the Druid stone. Will you go down into the chamber? There are no ghosts but toads.'

Philip Rutterby did not care a rush just now for Druid stones; he feigned an interest clumsily; spoke awkwardly about it, in forgetfulness of the diplomatist's creed that the use of speech is to conceal your thought. But the two went down into the cavernous chamber together—the cavernous chamber in the solitary waste land of an opulent country—and came up again, and

marched homewards. Rutterby, spurred on almost to folly by a not distant rivalry, was quite aware that he had said nothing worth saying—little which that gentle girl could have really cared to hear—and he welcomed a swift shower which, as they needs must shelter, must prolong his time with her. Very near them was a large homestead, with granaries, cattle-sheds, and wood-house.

'The wood-house will be the place,' said Ondelette, leading the way with a run, and stooping under the rough friendly roof with her feet on the floor of bare soil, dry with time. The wood was stacked round them. Light enough came in at the unglazed rough windows.

Mr Rutterby looked about him at the bare stone walls and high pitched roof, at the saw-dust, at a neglected trestle, a neglected hatchet.

'Ostade would have liked to paint this place, with its half-lights and shades,' he said.

'I should so much like Ostade's pictures, then! I love anything that is tumble-down and dreary, and common, and dull, and sad,' said she. Philip Rutterby was standing close to her, and now, as she spoke, looked almost anxiously at her dark brown eyes, with their long lashes giving depth to their darkness, and a sense of quietude, much

in accord with her young French voice of subtle tenderness.

The shower was suddenly over; and the two looked out together from the window. It was autumn sunset. Shafts of wan yellow were shot up very feebly by the spent sun, into the greyness and the calm of the high skies. The wind had gone down now, but a deep under-roll was in the sea ; a turbid sea, of dark grey greens and autumn browns ; angry, forbidding, and bitter and wild, along its miles of rocky coast and in unnumbered leagues in the infinite west. Ondelette saw all that, and was a little awed by it. She knew nothing of any element of storm in Rutterby's heart.

'You love anything that is tumble-down and dreary, and common, and dull, and sad,' said Rutterby, repeating her words after her, and laying his hand, which trembled a little, on Ondelette's warm hand by the rough window-sill. An anxious, nervous, over-sensitive man, snatching with useless haste at the unready Future. The quickened pulses promised a keener life, compared with which that past life must seem but as a sleep.

'Think of me very kindly when I go away, Ondelette,' he said, checking himself.

'You have only just arrived. Do not talk about going,' said she.

What should he say next, when her look was sympathy and kindness? Why not say, that suddenly she had become much to him? But no. For a minute he was silent.

'I shall owe more than one pleasant time and happy thought to you, Ondelette,' he said then, gravely, and lifted the young hand to his bent face, and kissed it. . . . And they went their way.

She made her usual music in the evening, but did not try to talk with him, as he was quiet and sad; and she felt that his life must have had some sadness in it—more than she knew of—more than she could understand.

Next day, at middle-day breakfast, came a telegram for Rutterby's host. It was from Jules Gérard. De Malmy did not read it aloud, but said presently—in such a manner that no one but Philip Rutterby guessed any connection between the telegram and the remark—'Ha! By-the-bye, Jules Gérard is coming to stay a day or two to-morrow. Have the second spare room arranged for him, *mon amie*.'

It was to Madame de Malmy that De Malmy spoke. But Ondelette flushed suddenly, and Rutterby saw it.

'My room, which must be larger, will be free. I am going to-morrow,' said Philip Rutterby, resolutely calm.

'I hope there was nothing amiss in your letters?' inquired Madame de Malmy.

'I am obliged to go,' answered the guest, quietly.

'I do not see why this young man should propose to himself to intrude on our happy little party. I am sure I wanted to see more of Mr Rutterby myself; and with two guests, in a small villa, you know—' began Madame de Malmy, again. But her lord abbreviated her discourse by saying in a full-toned voice, 'I see that the archæologists, meeting at Clisson—' And so the talk was turned to art and antiquarianism.

Why analyse Philip Rutterby's mind, or by what devious ways he had come at last, and at last suddenly, to decide to go? Of course, if he had coolly and determinately fixed on the idea of marriage, his friend and his friend's wife would have helped his claim. And Ondelette hardly knew herself; and with her dutiful love and infinite pity and young naïve sympathy, she might have said she would be Rutterby's wife, and, with her honour and pure-hearted dignity,

have kept the promise to the uttermost, and in some sort learnt to love a foreigner, a stranger, a lonely man, with his life in the Past and hers in the Future.

But how much of that love would have been spontaneous and free? Would it on his part, as time passed, and the new presence and new pleasure became familiar things of every day—would it then continually dominate, as it did in those brief hours at Pornic, over the older memory, strong with the passion of youth, and long renewed by the accumulating thoughts of many days, by the very knowledge of joys that might have been participated, and loneliness that might have been companionship? No, no. Ondelette, and all the new and possible experience with her, could be but the sweet echo of a far-away voice. And the voice was more than the echo.

In the evening Philip Rutterby followed De Malmy to his study.

'Three pages and a half during the morning, Rutterby,' said the host, holding up the monograph in triumph. 'And after three months' labour, I think I have demolished my *confrère's* theory as to the existence of an *ogival* window—' He would not ask his guest the reason of his departure. But Rutterby had come in to speak,

and, like most strong-feeling men, he could speak to the purpose when the occasion moved him.

'I have thought a good deal about my going away,' he said, pacing the room with his thin hands clasped behind him, 'and it seems to me only right, De Malmy, that you should know the reason of it. I have had my last romance at Pornic. I have been in love with Ondelette.'

De Malmy, sitting at his writing-desk, bowed his head slightly, in token that thus far he 'followed' Philip Rutterby, and that his friend might be assured of sympathetic attention.

'Madame de Malmy, if you consulted her in the matter, would probably give her vote for me, and not for this young man. You, yourself, are an old friend of mine, and it would be pleasant to you to have a tie binding us very closely together; and again, you would not unnaturally feel more immediate confidence—I do not say more permanent—in giving your daughter to a very dear old friend, than to a young man of another generation—almost a stranger—whose thoughts and ways would never be like yours and mine, De Malmy, since ideas change every year, and you and I belong, as we know very well, to an old *régime*. . . . Well, then, Ondelette, with whatever secret and unacknowledged

misgivings, would probably assent. Well, well, then . . . it is *I* who refuse. Let her marry this young man, as the natural thing is.'

'I understand you imperfectly,' said De Malmy.

'Let her marry this young man, as the natural thing is. As to means, you know, they will have between them eight hundred a year, which will do for the present. Afterwards—— But the vital point is just this, De Malmy: she was born to make the happiness of some life that has a Future. Well, the Future is for this young man; the Past is for me. No, no, it is not all self-sacrifice, by any means, if I go away. You remember two-and-twenty years ago—Hyères—I do not forget the Past. Why speak of that? You look at me, really, dear friend, with a very civil surprise, as if you *would* believe in some self-sacrifice after all, though you know I have not generally in life been a man called upon to make it. If this is almost my first opportunity, let me take it, then, if you will have it so. One must not regard oneself and one's own life as the centre of everything. That is the thing we rich men have to guard against—the world revolves round *us*, we think. Even if my own happiness were in question—

which perhaps it is not—wouldn't Ondelette's happiness be of more importance than mine?'

He put his hand into De Malmy's and shook it silently, for good-night.

He came down early in the morning, very pale and tired. He had seen from his window that Ondelette, with fresh morning-gown, and hair in a twist of gold, was busy in the sunny garden, with the grey-red chrysanthemums.

'I am going to say a word to Ondelette,' he whispered to De Malmy, as he met him on the stairs.

'Say what you will. You are a fine, brave fellow, Rutterby. Whatever you say she will hear considerately. She always would do that, of course; but last night I told her especially what a very fine fellow you were, Rutterby. There is no one, dear friend, whom she likes better than you. Speak to her.'

She heard his step coming towards her in the garden, and lifted her head, flushed with stooping. Did she, too, come, as her favourite flowers, like love in winter?

'Ondelette,' said Mr Rutterby, 'I have a word to say to you before I go.'

'Yes,' she answered gravely, laying her hand on his, struck with his face.

'The young man who is coming here to-day, comes here to ask for you to be his wife.' She took her hand away suddenly; but Philip Rutterby took it back again, and did not flinch at all as he continued. 'The young man, Jules Gérard, is worthy of you, my child. A manly fellow, as you and your father know, better than I do. In due time you will be his wife—you will both be very happy. I am going to start this morning, and you will think of me sometimes, among my works of art—my pictures—that talk to me. And you must not pity my loneliness, you know, after all, with that companionship. For pictures are the better voices of great men. But sometimes—sometimes you will think of me, my sweet child?'

He kissed her gravely. She looked up, with many feelings.

'Mr Rutterby, why are you going away?' she asked, very earnestly.

He did not answer for a minute. Then he said only, 'I have heard and thought of sad things—sad things, Ondelette—which I need not tell you.'

London, December, 1874.

YVONNE OF CROISIC

YVONNE OF CROISIC

The little farm-house—Yvonne's home—stood, sober and grey, among the grey-green fields, but half-a-mile from Croisic town. No ivy lodged under its eaves, no vine crept confidently up its southern wall, and the fields around it were wide and bare, for close beyond—just within sight from the top of the haystack—was the rock-bound shore, and all that country-side was swept, from October to March, with the heaviest winds and shrewdest salt from the great western sea.

It was a lonely country, leading nowhere. Croisic itself is the last town or village of the long narrow land-strip which has the Atlantic to the west and south, and to the north a huge gulf, like an inland lake, dividing it from the mainland of Brittany. And Croisic turns its back on the farm, and its back on the outer sea. Nearer to inland France, from Croisic,

is Bourg de Batz, set on a sand hill, over its square salt-marshes, intersected with streams from the sea. Nearer again to inland France is Le Pouliguen, a bathing-place, with a little white bay, facing the sun and the south. But these seemed far from Yvonne's home, beyond which, as was said before, the roads led nowhere, or rather, becoming mere rough lanes with waggon tracks between the fields, lost themselves at last on the wide belt of coast—here brown or green with its short grass, here grey and stony in its barrenness—that formed the top of the great cliff wall, beneath which lapped blue in summer, or thundered grey in late autumn and desolate winter, the ceaseless waves of the Atlantic.

And that lonely country made lonely lives for those who dwelt in it. It bred in them a certain self-reliance and large quietude, hardly found in the inhabitants of cities or of crowded garden lands—a large, restful, fearless quietude, as of those accustomed to be much alone with peaceful farm-work, and the beasts, and the wide field-crops, and the wider sky.

The farm-life and the lonely country had their own effect in moulding the few dwellers near that Peninsula's point; and the influence

was a constant one — greater, perhaps, just because constant, than that of the curé who preached on Sunday morning at Croisic church. But, after all, both influences were somewhat to the same end, of patience, quietude, sobriety; and to remind the farm-folk—Yvonne among them—of some life stranger than theirs, higher than theirs, since filled with sorrow and sacrifice, there stood, where the two roads met from the coast, the dark, worm-eaten cross, with its uplifted figure—the only sign to them, in all that country-side, of an existence other than their own of quiet hand-labour and quiet rest.

So the bare, rough, homely farm, at this world's end, just beyond Croisic town, was no forcing ground for human feelings; and human life might grow and spread there, one would think, in its own natural way: the common love of parent and child coming slowly, but firmly, half unrecognised, because in each case purely individual and genuine; and that other love—the love of man for woman—girl for boy —coming sweet, and new, and strong, and unchecked alike in its birth and its fulness; and from first to last never measured with curious care, to see if it fitted the fanciful loves in story books and plays.

It was September, evening. Yvonne—the farmer's daughter—was not at the farm. Rohan, a fisher youth from Piriac, had put his arm in hers, and led her along the lanes to the coast. With the warm autumn and her eighteen years, the time of love had come to her.

But it began quietly, and was of gentle growth, like any natural thing; and this girl, very capable of passion, was lulled rather than stirred by the presence in the lane with her of that brown, sturdy figure, which owed its litheness and its young, manly grace and its sea-beaten beauty to many days and nights spent bending over the fishing-boat—anchoring or heaving anchor—or setting sail to catch the changing winds that came fresh over the western sea.

Yvonne was calm in his presence. But the natural soothing pleasure was not to last long now, for in the background of that simple mind of Yvonne's was the knowledge or the thought that the new pleasantness in life must cease—the two must part. And the thought came up to her, suddenly, as he led her along the lane.

'When are you going away?' she asked, suddenly grave.

'The boat is ready to-night,' he said. 'Because it is ready, I must go to-morrow.'

That was matter of fact; and it grieved her, but did not surprise. He was not rough at heart, though rough in words. And he added —seeing the trouble on her clear face—'My mate is bound to be at Piriac again. I must stick to my mate, whether I will or no.'

She had been half inclined to motion his arm away from hers. They could walk separately, and talk all the same. But his last tone had been very gentle, and though she saw no end but a parting for them, the parting need not be before its time. So she let him hold her arm still firmly in his grasp, and they walked quite silently along the lane together.

Here was the great rough crucifix, lifted high where the lanes met and widened towards the coast. She forgot to cross herself. Here was the bare field, giving place to barer, wind-blown shore. Here was the water, blue beneath them, tumbling in upon the strewn boulders and the black line of sea-weed on the beach. 'The Point of Croisic'—the peninsula's end—and to right and left, as well as full in front of them, the sparkling evening sea, and an immense sky, orange-red at the sea's far edge, but fading above

them into clear thin tones of bluish silvery grey.

They sat down on the bare grey rock, still almost warm with the long day's sun. Rohan passed his hand over the lichen-crust that roughened the surface ; found her hand there too. It was a fine hand for a half peasant hand ; shapely and sensitive, though brown and strong. He put his own, broadened with heavier work, upon it ; and did this gently, to her who looked gently at him. There was nothing coarse or common in the action of either. That Breton population is born civilised. School boards might teach it geography, but not refinement.

'It is a long way—Piriac. It is beyond the furthest point,' said Yvonne, thinking of his home.

'Yes,' replied Rohan, hesitatingly ; 'with a good wind, five hours.'

'It is so far, I never saw it on the clearest day. It is beyond the furthest point,' reiterated Yvonne, looking at the line of mainland coast. To be beyond the furthest point was to be beyond imagination's widest reach. It must be at the world's far end—Piriac. 'And what is there after Piriac?' asked the girl, with all the readiness of an untrained mind to slip, even in

moments of strong feeling, from an anxious train of thought on to another quite indifferent one. And so the personal question of her lover's distance, to-morrow, was forgotten in the abstract question of what the world might be beyond Piriac.

Rohan, being a fisher, had sailed far—travelled wide.

'After Piriac,' he said, 'there is Sarzeau, then Quimper, then even Brest.'

She heaved a sigh. It was a great world, then. Well, it was for other people to see it—not for her.

She leaned back on the rock. Her thick-soled country shoes and strong, straight ankles lay out beyond the last fold of her blue-grey gown. The gown's tight bodice pressed the stout firm figure about the breast and large throat; and the sleeve, on an arm thrown freely out, reached but midway between the elbow and wrist, showing the arm where it got full and white, above the sun-browned wrist and hand. She had long, pendent ear-drops, of base gold, roughly worked, for only ornament. They were less bright and straight than her teeth, seen now between the parted lips. One hand was held to shade the sunlight from her grave black eyes.

She looked a little sad again, as Rohan saw. What could he say or do? He bent quietly over her, and said, with his strange Breton calmness,

'Yvonne—I love you.'

She lifted herself up at once—a deeper colour in her warm-toned face. He said the words again. But she shook her head.

'Would you—some day—let me come again? Then, if the fishery is good this year, would you —would you go with me to Piriac?'

She took her hand from her eyes, and looked at him very straight, and honestly, but sadly.

'No. . . . I am Croisicaise. . . . We are all of Croisic. . . . It is of no use. . . . I cannot do differently from all the rest. . . . Rohan, I daresay I shall never be married—but I must live and die in Croisic.'

A modern Englishman would take such a devotion to place rather than person as final and sufficient proof that there was no love at all. The simple Breton sailor had not learned our way of disbelief in any love that is not wholly absorbing. Rohan, not being suspicious, was also not exacting. Other claims upon her were as natural as his—she had wishes, thoughts, interests of her own, which the new-found love need not quite supersede.

He never thought then that she did not love him, because she said so strongly she must live and die in Croisic town. But he did think—as a sailor, with the sea for his wide home—that her attachment was too particular and local. He wondered at the strength of it. 'Who is it you love so much?' he asked, after a silence. 'What is it here that you could never leave? . . . The world is pretty well the same. Piriac, Croisic, what matters? If I were a girl I should be able to live as far as Quimper—perhaps even Brest—if the man I loved asked me.'

'But you don't *know*,' she answered. 'You never had to try—and you don't *know*, Rohan.'

'That may be true,' he answered, with commendable philosophy. The fact was undeniable—he had never had to try. And they were silent again for a while. There were tears now in Yvonne's eyes. She had seen him only a little, but loved him very much. It was all such a new joy to her, and new sorrow.

'I never knew before to-night,' she said, at last, 'how much I loved the place. Of course, I knew that I should have to spend my life here. That was only right—being Croisicaise. I never could change myself into a Bretonne. But I never felt before to-night—only you can't under-

stand me—how I should be sad if any strange thing happened, that I *had* to leave it. . . . Well, think of me sometimes when you have got round the furthest point. We have been very happy together. . . . Whenever I can get to Croisic church, at Benediction, I shall pray Our Lady of Croisic, and she will keep you safe, as she has never forgotten to keep my brothers. . . . You can think of me sometimes. You must have lazy hours in the boats. Think, I'd have done anything for you, except being Croisicaise no more. Or no! That is no good after all. You'll see, some day, some other girl to your mind. A Bretonne, Rohan; doubtless the good God wills it so. You had better forget me, then.'

Yvonne rose to her feet. It was supper-time at the farm, and the dusk was gathering. Rohan, while she spoke, had looked out rather hopelessly on the last of the sunset; but the beauty of it had not been lost on him or on the girl. The poor never talk of scenery, but the finer spirits among them sometimes sit and watch it, with its changing lights, reverently; sit with placid hands crossed or folded, as in act of devotion. Of it they have nothing to say, but it somehow speaks to them—things half

understood, strange snatches of suggestion of wider life and thought—as they wait, with their eyes fixed, in their grave loneliness.

And so, quite silently, Rohan and Yvonne trudge homeward towards the farm. The quick dusk of that country-side has fallen now, and the long flat land, of bare low-walled meadows, and square-cut salt-marsh, is dull and grey with the coming night. She is thinking, will he ever sail again in these seas near to Croisic, in that huge gulf beyond which is Brittany? and will some second mishap bring him to Croisic port and town, and, while again the boat is mended, will he stay, and find his path to the farm, where she, with placid, unchanged life, must still be at her farm-work? No, no! what does she know about the boat? about his mate, his life, his toil, his home, far out of sight on the Breton coast? These can be nothing to her but a pleasant dream, from which, on the morrow, when he is gone once and for all, she will wake resolutely.

Why it is even now a by-past thing. The friendship, such as friendship is among the poor, who have no intellectual interests in common, to foster and encourage it—the quick friendship, the strange love, the kiss, the walk at twilight,

the sad denial to him that evening—all was well over now : well nigh as past and over as to-morrow when he should be gone. The familiar beasts, she knew and called by name, crooned low or bellowed in the homestead : the watch-dog barked at the unknown step of the stranger; it was supper-time; the light shone through the window. Inside she knew that the small oil-lamp stood on the round table, laid with plates for three. And the father sat at ease after the day's work, and the mother was serving a dish, and had brought from the dark oak *bahut* the bottle of thin white wine for the evening's meal; and all this was as it had been on many nights for many months—nay, Yvonne's whole life had scarcely known other than that regular round—and Rohan had no part in it; nor she in Rohan, and whatever life might be his, in unknown places, beyond the furthest coast.

And so, when, as they pass the wicket-gate, and go in across the grass-grown, uneven, pebble-paved yard, the fisher youth puts his arm on hers again, and bends his head close over her, and says so earnestly, 'Tell me one thing, Yvonne—do you love me?' she is not sure at first of her reply, but says, as she touches the latch of the iron-bound thick wooden house-

door, 'I don't know. . . . . I am very young. . . . . I think I love you. This is my home.'

This was her home, and he was not one of her people, and could not enter there, to break in upon that strange exclusiveness of Croisic, which refused to be Breton. She had said to him, 'I think I love you,' but then the qualification, 'This is my home.'

The very place on which they stood, and its surroundings—those of her whole life—seemed to make a new distance between them. So very quietly she gave him 'Good-night,' which was perhaps 'Good-bye,' only he knew the way across the fields from the port, and might, if very earnestly minded, come once more in the morning.

He vanished into the dark of the country lane as she shut the heavy house-door slowly—then stopped suddenly, thinking she heard a sound outside: listened with strained ears and fixed eyes. Rohan—could he be coming back? Was there something else to say? How could he brave the farmer at his hearthside; the mother quietly awaiting her child? No, there was nothing to bring him back. He had no place there. And with only the slightest shadow of sadness, on her strong, simple, contemplative

face, Yvonne passed on into the farm-house eating-room, and sat down to her meal.

They knew where she had been, or, rather with whom she had been, and that it was not the first time she had been with him, and a word of very mild disapproval had been spoken that forenoon, and she knew well that father and mother would think nothing was lost when the boat was in right trim again, and the young foreign sailor had gone, for good, beyond the furthest point.

But at supper his name was not mentioned. Silence as to the cause of her absence was their only sign of disapproval of it. Nothing seemed much amiss to them. She looked at them with all the wonted candour of her dark wide-open eyes, with their expression of receptiveness and waiting. The day's work, and the evening walk, and the air sharpened with salt from the sea, had made her healthily hungry. Even love left her body at peace ; and the stout old farmer, looking up from his loaf and his fried fish and his mug of white wine, thought confidently, 'There is nothing amiss. The young will be young. But nothing is wrong, and the stranger will go to-morrow.'

The mother's meal was over, and she sat with

folded hands in the wooden armchair by the side of the hearth, as was her wont after supper. The same chair in the same place, winter and summer. At supper she talked, but sat meditative afterwards, straight upright in her chair. Restless or fussy people would have called it idle, and to other natures than that country nature it might have been stupid and dull. But old Annaic looked forward to the time, after the day's work and evening meal. Her face composed itself, and her hands 'settled'; and she sat seemingly waiting, waiting for nothing, with great restfulness. Her dumb quietude recalled that of the cattle.

Presently, when the clock struck, the mother rose—it was the regular time, never, in many years, departed from—old Annaic rose, and struck a match for Yvonne's candle, which was the signal for Yvonne to go to her father to be kissed for 'Good-night.' And that was the signal to Joel to put his pipe out; and when Yvonne had gone, the old man lifted the oil-lamp, by whose light they supped, and with this in hand he trudged upstairs, followed closely by Annaic.

Yvonne was now in her room. Leaving it hurriedly early in the evening, she had left the

lattice window closed, as it had been closed all day. The room was hot, wanting its evening air, and the girl went now to open the window at the time at which she generally shut it. She knew quite well why she had forgotten to open it when the heat of the day was over. The walk with Rohan—Rohan in the lane!

All that was so far past, only a minute ago, when she had put her fresh brown cheek by her father's for 'Good-night,' and everything had been as it had been for many years. But now it had come back once more—the strange experience—and as she stood at the window and felt the night air, keen, but not harsh, from the sea, she remembered his voice; her face flushed unconsciously at the thought of his kiss, his pressure, his strong warm words, the like of which she heard for the first time: she, a lonely farm girl, young and calm, and with little thought but of her kin, and the farm work, and the cattle, and the fishing-fleet that came (her brother's boat amongst it) at night round Croisic pier into Croisic port.

She looked down at the farm-yard; the beasts were quiet; the watch-dog asleep; the haystack rose dark against the sky. She looked beyond, and there was the flat country, one space of

meaningless plain to stranger eyes, but to her, all a familiar land; she could pick out in the dark the spot where the roads met, and the side where the salt-marsh was, and the Five Acres, and the distant line of the Grande Côte—where the loftier shore was set against the sea.

'Perhaps—if he were but a Croisicais!' she thought. . . . And to-morrow he would be gone!

The breezy morning found her at her work again, and Rohan did not come. The one farm-servant had gone off early into Croisic, on a two days' leave. Yvonne was busy. The servant had gone to have her bridesmaid's part in wedding festivities. That morning there was the service in Croisic church; then the feast in the town; and then the wedding party, with bride and bridegroom at their head—preceded only by the music-maker hired for the time—were to set out on the long, seemingly endless walk, through country, and past village inn; through Bourg de Batz, set on the sandhills, to Le Pouliguen, between its hazel coppice and its little sunny white bay, then round to Guérande, the Middle Age town, from whose ramparts one looks down on the gulf and the long peninsula, with Croisic near to the end of it, and beyond it

the outer sea; and then, at last, into Croisic again,—the folk, however weary, still tripping two and two *au son du biniou*, and in time with that strange music. So they would trip and trudge all day, and again, faithful to custom and duty, all the morrow. And then, these gaieties passed, the freshly-married pair would settle to common life. The hired music-maker would encourage some other party on the march, and the farm-servant go back to the farm.

In thought, Yvonne would be with her a little that morning—more than a little, now that Rohan did not come. Well, Rohan had taken her words as final words, and with his mate, in the fishing-boat, was off to some far port she did not know.

'The young man who came, he said, from Piriac, or beyond Piriac, and was about here pretty much the last few days,—he is gone, eh?' asked old Joel, at their midday meal.

Yvonne, thus suddenly taken, suddenly reminded, only nodded assent. It would have been hard to say, 'Yes, father.'

The old man stretched his long legs comfortably out under the table. He looked contented, but said nothing. 'It is wise and well,' he thought. Old Annaic's face smoothed and composed.

What might have been a trouble—since the young have ways of youth—was well over. Even apart from all the binding Croisic customs, which were religion itself to them, they could not spare Yvonne. Their two sons, finding the farm but bare and poor, and loving the excitement and chances of the sea, had long ago passed over from farm life to the Croisic industry, and manned a fishing-boat, which came sardine-laden into Croisic port, these autumn nights. They had their home in Croisic town, and their wives and children too, for they were many years older than Yvonne. Yvonne seemed the only young fresh thing at the farm. The future of the farm was, in a sense, with her.

She had gone out of the room after their meal; and Joel and Annaic, left alone, looked at each other and were satisfied. Old Joel rose, his hand in breeches' pocket, feeling for a key. He went to the bureau which stood under the window.

'There is not so great a dowry to count for her, wife,' he said, opening the lock; 'but when she chooses a Croisicais, he must come and live here at the farm with us, eh?' he said, now handling lovingly his leather bag, with a score or so of gold coins in it—nothing more.

'And that may be as soon as the child likes,' said old Annaic, somewhat earnestly; 'for you are not as young as you were, and I—I get more tired of a night than I used to get. This next Saint-Martin we shall have been married six-and-thirty years.'

'He looked a sturdy, honest fellow—that I may say, now he is gone,' said Joel, referring, as his wife knew well, to Rohan.

'That may be—he was amiss here. What can we know of any man who comes from Piriac? Poor girl, I saw that if he stayed much longer she would fancy him. Praise be to God, he is out of sight, and Yvonne's a good girl.'

With that reflection ended their desultory conference, for there was work to do.

Yvonne was in the garden, and before sunset there came a friend from Croisic—the daughter of the landlord of the inn. Jeanne Builloré came to fetch something at the farm, and told Yvonne what was the news. Yvonne was strangely absent, when she began to speak of the wedding procession, marching, *au son du biniou*, in front of the inn, along the length of quay, and so off by the dusty road, to Bourg de Batz.

'By this time they will have got round as far as Guérande,' said Jeanne. 'Perhaps they will

dance there, before coming home. How I should like to see! But have you heard how good a take our Croisic boats had yesterday? Never such piles of fish-baskets on jetty and quay! You must come down to-night. Come down an hour after me; meet me at the pier-head. Watch the boats in with me—you can get away for once.'

Yvonne nodded gravely. Yes, she would go to-night. She rarely went. These small excitements—the only ones perhaps open to her—did not seem needed by her tranquil nature, self-reliant, and in the main quietly happy in her regular round. But she would go to-night.

So the dark found her under the short light-house tower at the pier's far end. Here the pier was broader than elsewhere along its length. A parapet, plain granite, like the pier itself, was round the end of it. The parapet was on one side only of the pier's full length—the exposed side — towards the west and the main sea. But at the end it went all round, a yard or so from the light-house base, so that two could just pass between the light-house and the bounding wall. And here, with eyes looking out eagerly to sea, stood Yvonne and Jeanne, pressing forward against the parapet. They sang in unison

a strange wild country song, or sailor song, half like a chaunt, with voices deep and clear. Then the boats, with set sails, swept up from the west, and passing near the pier's end, went round into the port.

'*A terre! à terre!*' the girls now cried to them, '*Breton, ou Croisicais?—il y a du vin à boire!*'

'*Croisicais!*' shouted the men from the boats. And the dark sails swept past into the port. The fishing was good, and the home-coming joyous. Yvonne, with nothing to gain, nothing to lose at the farm, threw herself into the quick life of the moment. Her friends, the Croisicais —she must give them welcome. 'Land! land! There is wine for you to drink.'

Presently, on the quay, far back from the pier's end, and among the scattered lights of Croisic town, and groups of watching folk, the incoming boats were unladen of their load. The sardine-salters, from the salting-house, came down and bargained for the spoil; so much money the dozen baskets, and a bottle of wine for luck; and then, the bargaining over, feasting began; and late into the night, mate and sweetheart, and wife and friend, sat merry-making in their humble rooms, with doors wide open, carry-

ing light and sound to quay and street. Jeanne had gone back to the inn, before whose door sat Builloré, her father, smoking the pipe of peace. Builloré's few guests were gone to bed; the father and two boys who had come from Nantes, for bathing; the man with his two sons who had talked with Builloré at dinner—for Builloré sat at the board with his guests, and compared experiences of inns at Nantes and Saint-Nazaire, as he sliced the well-cooked fare, homely and *bourgeois*. Builloré had waited for Jeanne, and now his chair was taken inside his house, his door shut, his light extinguished. Sleeping-time was come.

And Yvonne? The excitement passed, the movement over, she had stood still at the pier's end, looking out broodingly to night and sea. Then it was time to go: it would be late at the farm. Rohan had gone; he had taken her at ner word. Had he been but a Croisicais! These Croisicais—her brothers—one great family with common interests—they were all so different from him. For all her love of place and townsfolk, there was something in Rohan from Piriac—strange—that she had not known before—that she would not willingly lose.

He was suddenly by her, as she was leaving

the pier, and spoke to her with no surprise—for he had heard of her there, incidentally, in the talk of a fisher-friend of Jeanne's upon the quay. So he went up quietly, and called her by her name.

'You!' she said, astonished. 'I thought, of course, you were gone.'

Was anything wrong?—the boat not ready at last?—the mate away? What?

Her eyes asked, 'What?' though she framed no question. He put his arm in hers, and they walked down the dark pier.

'I have been to the farm, but I saw no one. I was a fool; staying for nothing—for what was the good of speaking to you? I could get but the same answer. . . . Only I just felt—that I *could not go.*'

She let herself be held close to him, walking a few paces on; then suddenly stopped: 'Rohan! what is the use? . . . . No, I cannot go out there. I must go back to the farm.'

They turned, and walked quite silently from pier to quay, from quay to little street, from little street into the lonely country road, making for her home. They had both too much to say. At first, perhaps, she hardly knew her own mind, save that she knew she

was glad he was there. And he—a simple sailor, with no clever art in love-making—he could not very easily press again what he had pressed last night. Perhaps his faithful presence would speak for him—his quiet waiting for the chance of seeing her—better than words.

For she knew his story: at least he had told it to her, at their earlier meetings. At Piriac, there was his mother, blind and old, rooted firmly, by age and weakness, to that Piriac soil. So he was rooted too. He could sail elsewhere; drop anchor here and there; see far ports, and be contented for himself wherever he was. But his home was Piriac. No Russian serf was ever more firmly fixed.

So this night's meeting was after all only a short reprieve. How intensely conscious was Yvonne, then, of every step of the way! The turn in the road; the second field-gate; the square salt-marsh gleaming in the night; their own low boundary-wall of loose stones from the coast; the cattle-shed, the hay-stack, the rounded tower-like corner of the farm-house, heavy, solid, grey-black in the night. And, with the freshness of autumn, rising wind full in her face, borne over the flat land from the furthest sea.

Here was the gate. Strange love-making! Hardly a word had been said. But she had not put him away.

She passed inside the short wooden gate. He held her hand still, and kissed her, once, quietly. She burst out suddenly, with many tears, and thick, deep sobs: 'Oh! Rohan, Rohan! Tell me! what am I to do? God! what am I to do?'

He could say nothing at the moment, but he stood, tried to be kind to her, and the tears passed. That weakness had been so unlike her. Now she was herself again, save that a storm had gone over her.

'You had better come to-morrow. At midday. I will speak to father and mother before that, and will ask them what we shall do. They will think me very unnatural, at first—wishing to leave them, and the place, and the people—all our friends. I know there are fine ladies going into convents, but that is for the good God, or to leave more to their brothers. But I am an only child, here at the farm. What would they do, the two together—father and mother—if I were gone? . . . . Just for myself, perhaps, after all, I could go away, you know. Because I love you,—yes, Rohan, I must love you!'

He caught with a new hope, and a rushing thoughtless happiness, all the look of yearning, yielding, in the sweet grave face—then bent suddenly over her, drawing her face to him, kissing quickly her dark brows. And then he was gone—to come back with stronger hope on the morrow.

It was late. And the first sound of Yvonne's hand on the door-latch brought her father to the door, holding a light on high. He did not speak to her, but followed her straight from the small stone passage to the living room, where she saw by the light of his candle—for the lamp was gone—that supper was long over. She thought her father's face looked troubled; and, keenly conscious of her inner conflict—half thinking too that he suspected it—her impulse was to show her sorrow. She threw her arms round him and kissed him vehemently. It half seemed to her she had been false to him. But he suspected nothing. There was nothing to tell him that Rohan had not gone; and if he thought anything of her excitement, he thought only that the cause of it was the child's realisation that it was all over—such natural pleasantness as there had been between those two. And so, when at last he

spoke, he spoke very tenderly, not chiding her for her lateness, but saying simply, '*C'est bien, mon enfant.* But your mother was tired. She went, as she goes always, when the clock strikes.'

There was the chair where old Annaic had been sitting. Should Yvonne go to her to say 'Good-night?'

'She sleeps,' said old Joel, moving towards the door, and wishing his daughter placid 'Good-night' himself. 'Sleep well, my child.'

They went up stairs together; the old man giving her the candle at her door. She went in, shut the door, and sat down on the bed. How should she tell them on the morrow? she thought. How should she persuade? What words could serve against the steady fact that linked her life to Croisic, as Rohan's to that unknown Brittany? Her face flushed red at the thought of it—was she not almost wicked, to plan and nearly hope for parting, and a new life which would be little different from her death to them! But Rohan was honest, manly, gentle, kind; and, in a few days, had become so much to her.

It was a hard question, and gave her a wakeful night. Turning from side to side of her low

bed, she watched, sleepless, and waited for the day. In the intense stillness she heard the striking of the clock downstairs. Four of the morning. The cock crew in the yard below her, and presently from the window, by her bed, she saw the dark night get greyer on the horizon—weird and cold—and then came the streak of red, widening and mounting in the sky, and the fields rose grey out of the night. Yes, this was all her home, and had been all her life around her. She welcomed it, after the sleepless hours, with weary eyes, and then suddenly slept.

It was an hour after, in the full light of September morning, that she woke, roused by her father's knock and call at the door. He said she was to come quickly—that her mother was ill.

Joel was, in general, a heavy sleeper, and it was Annaic who woke first. But this morning it had been different. Perhaps Annaic, from her unexplained fatigue of the overnight, had slept a little longer. Anyhow, the old man was himself awake and thinking of rising, when she turned in her bed, opened her eyes, and seeing the full light, sprang suddenly; then sunk back on the bed again, faint or unconscious.

The old man had not known what to do. Almost for the first time in his life he was in presence of sudden illness. Even the common immediate remedies were strange to him, or, at all events, long in coming to his slow thoughts. He had left Annaic still unconscious when he called his daughter, and, in hurriedly donned raiment, prepared to go for skilful aid into the town.

He said to Yvonne what he was going for, and he then straightway went. He had been gone hardly a minute when Yvonne, with loose hair and troubled face, passed across the passage from the one bedroom to the other, and was by her mother's side, touching, with her warm strong hand, the livid fingers—looking, suddenly hopeless and awed, into the glazing eyes. The girl never said, afterwards, to strangers, what she had done in those first terrible moments. But presently her mother was lifted and placed more placidly than before in the bed. Yvonne's lips blanched when she at first suspected, next was awfully assured, that she was in the presence, not of illness, but of death.

The half-hour between her father's going and returning was at last over—the half-hour that seems years, because it is filled with many

thoughts that drag laborious as actions, with fancies more real than facts. Times like these mark epochs in life; they cut it sharply asunder. The continuity of life is broken: life divided once for all. There is a Past henceforth, which is *wholly* past—the memory of days, years, feelings, experiences, which are left for ever beyond recall; and with the death of others, in the flesh, dies sometimes too much the life of our own spirit.

Her father's step over the bit of paving of the yard, the clink of the house-door latch, his mounting of the stairs with the rough doctor of that country-side, the entry into the room which had grown to Yvonne like a prison from which she, in her ghastly solitude, only longed to flee—these things she remembered ever after vividly, but told them to no one.

Then the examination had to be made—the simple malady was easily within the range of the old surgeon's knowledge. There was little that he had to say, except the due direction for the next day's funeral. And again Yvonne was in the house and alone: her father had gone again, and this time for some hours, into Croisic town. The horrible business, which keeps stricken men up at such a time, had to be done by him.

A woman, one of their nearest neighbours—she could not, though the nearest, be so very near a one—had come in soon after old Joel's leaving. She was upstairs in the bedroom with Annaic. Yvonne stood below, waiting at the window of the living-room. For now there had been time to think that Rohan would be coming. He could not see the father now. He could not plead now. All that pleading, that had been looked for so anxiously, seemed a now far-away thing.

It was a splendid autumn day: the pitiless bright sun, high in the sky, shone down over the large flat land, touching the parched dry fields with more brilliant hue, and making the grey salt-marsh flash here and there with silvery light. The dust on the white road—the thin soil of the lane—was raised by the happy breeze that came from the grey rocks, and the clear blue tumbling sea. Yvonne went outside the house, and crossed the yard, and stood by the low wall of loose stones from the coast, and looked up the road towards the salt-marsh and Croisic town, and down it to where the dark wooden crucifix stood alone above the fields, where the two roads met and became one lane which led its lonely way between broken bits of

wall and hedge to the high green cliff top, in front of the now sparkling sea.

It was the very world's end, in its bright loneliness—the farm, that day. She looked up at the broad blue sky, flecked with little white clouds that changed with the wind: she looked right and left again, along the bare road. No sound of voice or footstep, but, with figure sharp relieved against the sky, the one stilt-mounted salt-stirrer moved to and fro along the straight tracks of the salt-marsh, stirring leisurely, here and again, with the long pole which is the tool for his work. No other sign of labour—hardly of life—but that stilt-mounted figure on his slow progress over the straight tracks of the marsh.

The loneliness, which had used to be happy, seemed cruel and not to be borne that day. Yvonne cried out against it, not indeed with voice or tears, but with her inmost heart, that long, cruel, endless, brilliant morning.

She came inside soon again, and sat down in her wonted chair in the living room, where at least the tall clock in the corner ticked kindly for companionship. Then Rohan came; first heard opening the gate, then seen at the open window, then boldly in the room with her, and

bending over her for the first instant, ready to press once for all the claim of his love, and to say to old Joel, her father, all that on the night before they had felt must be said.

He stood back; or she put him aside—who knows? He saw at once her changed face, and strange trouble.

'*Comment?*' he said to Yvonne, with voice caught in with fear.

She said to him quite simply, with some touch re-found of that old calm of hers which came alike of life and character—'Rohan; my mother is dead.'

All the simplicity and directness of the short words, spoken with the solemn calm of one to whom the intense hours of thought and feeling have even now already put that new death into the order of accepted things, made the young man stand back aghast. And he could only mechanically echo her last word, 'Dead!' and she had to be the witness of surprise for him—her own being so utterly past.

She told him quietly—sitting down again in her chair, and with hands joined on grey apron and lap—a very little more: all that it was needful anyone should know. She got up then—tears in her eyes, but the low-toned voice hardly

quivering perceptibly—and went to him, and putting a hand on his, said very slowly, 'So you won't force me to say many times—you see you must go—Rohan!'

He vowed, of course, what any man, high or low, fisher or citizen, would have vowed then, in few words, earnestly—that he could not go: she must not send him away in her trouble. But he had to see, as she stood quietly by him, that the very quietness of tone and look implied finality. He had come in too late for the battle. The battle—if battle there had been—was over.

So he only said, hesitatingly—the strength being hers—'I may come again? In the spring? Next year?' And still less confidently: 'The autumn? Things change!'

Yvonne's eyes turned for a moment from him, lighted on the hearth, the father's chair, her own, her mother's.

She looked at him again, and shook her head, slightly, with quivering lip. But it was quite enough in its sad decisiveness. Soon afterwards he was gone.

Presently her father trudged wearily back, and came, a broken man, into the house and room. He spoke a few words about the

morrow: sighed as he sat down. And they sat together silently.

The day had changed to afternoon. From Croisic port the fishing-boats with spread sails, orange and brown-red, were scudding round the pier's end to the live, open sea. The bathers had bathed; the post had come from Saint-Nazaire and far-away Nantes; the dinner cloth was laid on Builloré's inn table; Jeanne, Builloré's daughter, was making ready for her father's dining-guests. And about the farm, far from all this little life of Croisic, shadows gathered, of the quiet afternoon. The sun crept round to the house-side; glowed more tenderly on roof and haystack and wide-stretching field. No one came near, and no sound broke the stillness; the barn-door fowls crossed the yard; the clock ticked very gently; and the day wore on.

They had said nothing to each other—father and child. The old man knew nothing, imagined nothing, of Rohan's visit. Even yesterday, the uneasy thought of the stranger had been past, for him. It was of quite other things that he was brooding now, with worn eyes now closed, now open.

At last—one cannot say why, save that such times must have an end, and common life, the

life of work and rest, be lived out after all—at last he looked up, appealingly, to Yvonne, who rose with him, and they went together, her head touching his shoulder gently, to the door.

'It is time to feed the cattle,' said the old man.

She understood that word, and, in a deeper sense than he, all that it signified of common task and lonely life resumed.

'It is time to feed the cattle.'

'*Oui, mon père.*'

And that new death, and that dead love, were both among the order of accepted things.

London, June, 1875.

THE FOUR BELLS OF CHARTRES

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A STRANGER walking out from Chartres, some Sunday, to the upland village of Le Coudry—say, at the hour of mass or of vespers—would see indeed there, on the edge of La Beauce, the typical church of rural France, but hardly its typical priest. Say, it is three o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. The sacristan is in the church already. That simple blue-bloused peasant, beadle and sexton in one, and doing on week-days the duties of serving-man at a small country-house some three or four miles away, pulls the church-bell on Sunday to summon the people by all their paths of the plain, from scattered farms, rare wayside cottages, and distant village street, hidden in a hollow out of sight. The church stands alone at the top of the ascent from the valley of the Eure—plain solid grey stone walls, and square tower, slate-

roofed, set against the breezy sky. Below it, on the one hand, looking towards Chartres, the road runs down, by little orchard and patches of poorish vine, to the valley with its green river-side meadows, its cattle-sheds, its rows of poplars along the bank of the stream. And beyond the valley there rises a hillside again, and the towers of Chartres cap the summit. But, on the other hand, looking south, and away from the valley and Chartres, it is plain, it is table-land, that extends to the far horizon. Just round the church itself there is the little close-walled churchyard, with its black wooden crosses among the unequal grass ; and across the road, opposite the church's tower, one large old oak—all that the country-side can boast of oak-trees—lifts itself above the brushwood of road-edge and low growth of scanty copse. Further away it is all plain and sky.

Slowly somehow the bell's one clear monotonous strike brings the people from the hidden village street, or from unsuspected homes lost somewhere to the eye in the wide expanse of clover and cornfield now low and bare with autumn. These white-capped brown-gowned peasants trudge by twos and threes along the open field-paths : their slow gathering from

many sides all tending to the church. Books in hand, they stand exchanging few and quiet words at the church's gate, or loiter about the small graveyard, waiting for the Curé. A flapping of long black raiment is seen at the turn of the highroad. The Curé, a little late, strides actively forwards, from background to middle distance; he is now a foreground figure, and now has passed through gate and churchyard into the small sacristy. The scanty company is gathered by this time in the church, and three of the blue-bloused peasant proprietors of France go from church to sacristy, and emerge in church again, peasants no longer, but lay clerks, white-surpliced singing men.

Half-an-hour passes—the service has taken its course. The priest has said his share by the altar, decked out in bravery contrasting with the bare and white-washed walls. The singing men, on their low platform or daïs placed out in the middle of the chancel and between the altar and the grouped village worshippers, have made strange discords. The grouped villagers on the rough pine benches have sat and knelt and risen. The Curé has gone into the pulpit for the last string of 'Ave Marias' with the beads, and the stranger can watch his face closely now, as the

old country priest leans forward with repeated phrase, to which the people answer. You catch not always, unless you are familiar, every word; but here and there, in the quick utterance. 'bénie parmi toutes les femmes . . . . et Jésus, le fruit de vos entrailles.' Clearly the last words are rung out for the twentieth time as for the first—another bead, closed eyes, and 'Jésus, le fruit de vos entrailles.'

The Curé is seventy-four; he is hale, serviceable, yet abstracted and sad. His accent, when you have caught it, in the native French, is not that of the priest but just removed from peasant, who ministers often in the country churches of France. And his people are all peasants, though some of them, with only a peasant's knowledge and a peasant's life, own wide enough fields—aye, and coupons of the Three per Cents to boot. Between them and him there is a wide, marked difference. Nay, between him and them there is seemingly nothing in common, except what years of association must needs have wrought; nothing in common, save for the somewhat fatherly relation which nineteen years have given him to the scattered people—the quickly ageing peasants who were almost young when he knew them first; the young who were

children when he began his monotonous tranquil service of nineteen years in those parts.

What has his life been? He is perhaps as simple as they; but why, on these rough faces, the everyday village simplicity at best—slowness of apprehension, regularity of handwork, paucity of experience—and on his the sign of far other memories, of a life not absorbed in the main in the task work of village service, whether his own of the church or theirs of the farm and fields? In that place, certainly a mystery of a face. Physically healthy, mentally tranquil, perhaps not uncheerful,—as cheerfulness goes—but certainly saddened. A face with the mixed expression of deep natures in age, or in the experience which may stand for age.

You cannot solve the question by a ten minutes' gaze—the chance look perhaps, after all, of chance moments in the pulpit. Or, as there are saintly men still, such faces may yet come without personal trouble—come of passionate brooding over poor lives and fatal errors of the many, unveiled to one more than another, felt by one more than another, and, under all the quiet, not quite absent, perhaps, even from these far-away fields of the upland plain. You do not know.

And so he comes down from the pulpit, his 'Aves!' done, and blessings given. Three white-robed singing men that were peasants pass out into the sacristy: three peasants that were singing men come back again into the church. Slowly the people disperse. A little more chatting in the churchyard, and looking at the sky, and prophecies of storm to-morrow—storm brooding now in the far south—and then the landscape of the plain is enlivened again by the home-trudging peasantry. White caps, blue blouses, disappear behind low roofs of straggling farm and cattle-shed; turn this and that way, are smaller, are lost, leaving the great plain all barren of life once more, as far as eye can see.

The Curé has something to keep him awhile in the sacristy; the sacristan is closeted with him—question perhaps of baptism or burial. At last both emerge. A pleasant parting word and smile and wave of hand from village priest to labourer, and the humbler has lunged forward on his way. The old man will quickly follow. For him too a look at the sky from that upland place whence the sky is so vast that it must be varied too; a look also at the graveyard, which is name and date to our chance stranger

—name and date, and nothing beyond — but which, to the old furrow-faced man now raising his stick as a first gesture of departure, is full of histories he has known, and is familiar with, this day. Then a step forward — the gate is closed—the tall figure age has hardly bent is out upon the road. The long black raiment is flapping in the wind, as *he* marches too to his unperceived home, somewhere amidst the silence of the plain. And now there is no figure anywhere. And with the strange stillness—save for the motion of the wind—a reserve and reticence which are those of a wide country only, are over these fields of the Beauce. Bare, dull, and blind, they have nothing to tell the stranger of the Past; nothing of the Future.

Five years ago, the old Curé, who seems, as he strides home on Sunday afternoon, so much a part of that landscape and its loneliness—five years ago, he with whom even short travel was an event, had an unusual absence, and he did not return alone. The village had heard, through the gossip of his old serving-woman, that his little house, when he came back, would have a third inmate. His niece was coming to him from her convent school.

To Monsieur Devallet, the old Curé himself, the news, when he got it in Paris, was a surprise and a pleasant one. Clémentine was the child of his brother; she was one of only two relations now remaining to a man who had lived his lonely life long enough to hear of rather than to see gap after gap in the family. The Curé's brother had been dead some years already, and the brother's child was placed in the convent school in Paris; visited there rarely by the old priest, and by his only other actual kinswoman, a sister, settled at Orleans since half a lifetime. The village priest, Monsieur Devallet, was both uncle and guardian of the girl; and his guardianship in those early years of the girl's life was best exercised, he thought, by leaving her very much undisturbed to her school work and to the influence of women to whom the best in France often confide their daughters. In this view, the choice for Clémentine for schooling was a choice of convents after all; and no teaching sisterhood had so high a fame as that of the 'Sacred Heart.' Its houses were all over France. Its rule was strict, but its teaching excellent. And no house of the sisterhood was deemed quite equal to that in the middle of old Paris, in the Faubourg St

Germain. Thither then Clémentine had been sent when a child, at the death of her father. Thence the old village priest had fetched her when schooling was done.

The absence of any life in common, for a couple of score of years—the complete division of interests which that entails—had made the Curé's sister at Orleans gradually of less and less account to him. They had rare brief interviews: visits which had got to be things of convention, and times when both hid from themselves the knowledge that joy and affection were played at more than felt; played at with excellent will indeed, and the best of unrecognised intentions but still at heart it was make-believe. Common interests were wanting to them. The old priest led his simple life, of service in church and visit in cottage and farm, in that secluded upland village of La Beauce. Madame Beaumarie, deep in the petty bustle of a provincial town, was pleased to consider she ruled Society. The small aristocracy of Orleans had long been her world; and it was a world that recognised no importance in any other.

Often and often had the Curé pondered, as in past years he had taken the accustomed solitary

walks by clover field, cabbage field, and patches of upland vineyard, on what might be the life in store for the child of his brother ; and it may be he had been led to that pondering by some instinctive undefined perception that here, with this girl, yet well-nigh a stranger to him, lay his one chance of companionship that might still be a delight. He was getting old when he first thought of it ; hale, but feeling some progress of the years. Alone so much with Nature, the trite enough thought was somehow solemnly borne to him—his life had none of the permanence of the fields. What were his own later years to be—the later still, and the last? All these village people were in some sense distant from him. Friendliness, respect, had always been between them : hardly love. He was not a model priest, to his own thinking, though only blamed by himself. What he lacked, perhaps —and recognised he lacked, now in these later times—was impulse, enthusiasm for his career. A certain element of routine and mechanism and monotony mixed itself with all the honesty of his work. The work was well, and the life blameless, but was either or both enough? The haunting thought of a vocation somewhere missed—a greater happiness somewhere eluded

—pursued him now and again in that repeated labour and service, among the simple people, in the wide and silent fields.

All this while, Clémentine was preparing for her life, by months and even years of an existence hardly less regular than his own. The early morning studies, the lessons steadily given by the skilled in languages and music, the friendships made and cherished in the scanty hours of ordered leisure, the walks in the great high-walled garden which Paris holds in its very heart without suspecting it—these things in their habitual interchange filled Clémentine's days; but the great Future was still coming, and we all in our youth look forward to To-morrow, with the thought that it must be brighter than any To-day.

One of two things Clémentine might do, thought the Curé, when schooling should be over: one of two things, hardly of three. What he had seen of the girl had made him already fond of her. To be too fond of her, to seriously fix his thoughts on her, ere she made her important choice—that had seemed to him a thing he was bound to guard against. She could hardly be his companion, in that lonely village and secluded life. Practically the choice

was small. A sojourn, shorter or longer, with Madame Beaumarie at Orleans, and then marriage, ordered as wisely as might be, and in the selection of husband he must have himself some share—that or the discovery, true or false, of a 'vocation,' as vocation is considered within convent walls; the choice, not for the world, but for the convent for life.

The Curé knew very well that that last was likely to be. As the time approached for leaving, or at least for decision, Clémentine was a favourite with the sisters of the Sacred Heart, and the Curé knew of influences that would be at work constantly. The good Monsieur Devallet was in spirit so little an ecclesiastic that he allowed himself at times to be sorry for those influences. They existed, and he allowed himself—priest as he was—to look them in the face, and at times to wish them away. The old man went no step in the track of the new Catholicism. He took his freedom, conservative and French, hardly knowing that he took it; and he did not want the convent life for Clémentine. Was she not more fitted for the activities of the world?

And so, of the two courses, Clémentine's going first to his sister might possibly be the

better. He would go there himself, then; get to know her more at that time; and the brother and sister, long divided, might find some common ground in planning in the true French fashion for the life and happiness of Clémentine. That at least was the thought with which he chose to solace himself, after the last—thus far—of those visits to the girl, which, rare indeed as they were, more and more impressed his imagination, and lived before him at his lonely meals or in the daily walks along the accustomed ways.

And so it was with a hesitation he hardly allowed himself to recognise, that he went for his last visit to the convent school. His sister had gone there from Orleans a day or two before, and both had agreed that school-days were finally over. Madame Beaumarie had written to her brother that as yet there was no sign of a 'vocation'; but perhaps a few months of the life of Orleans—some wayward fancy perhaps not yet to be foreseen—might produce the momentary distaste for our common ways which, under religious influence, may ripen into mysticism. The world must be lived in very long—its spirit thoroughly entered into—some one of its attractions found

absorbing—before the convent ceases to be a possible resource, and a girl's own life has led her irrevocably beyond its gates.

The old priest—a comely black-draped figure in a second-class carriage—journeyed up by the train, reading alternately his breviary and some secular volume. Presently he was in the city, striding through it, with here and there an inquiry of the way, till he reached the portals of the great house of the sisterhood. Then the request to see his niece, the permission asked for him in turn by a subordinate of one in authority, and he was led into the large visiting-parlour, and presently some gentle nun, with subdued gesture and scant speech, came in with Clémentine. A few words only and courteous bows of departure, and the old man and the girl were left alone.

It was pleasant to him to see her. She reminded him of his brother, of whom he had been fond, and of his brother's wife, who had been beautiful and who had died young. Clémentine was perhaps not precisely beautiful; but she was brown-cheeked, black-eyed, glossy-haired, splendidly healthy, and gay because she was French. More than that, she was his niece. To a man who is a father, a niece may be a

distant relation, but to a childless man she may be very near—how near will depend on whether he belongs to the class whose first need it is to love themselves, or to the class whose first need it is to love some other.

And so, with a tenderness in his face that had some memories in it, and a bright cheerfulness which his instinctive sympathy with that bright young life gave him, he kissed Clémentine and talked to her, and had no thought at the moment of the question he was going to put to her, and of what depended on the answer. She was full of talk, it happened — said ordinary things which were made bright and pleasant by the pleasantness of her ways—and when Monsieur Devallet did remember and think of himself, he was in no hurry to stop her. But at last, standing by the window and turning his head round to face her, he said :

'Clémentine, my child.'

Evidently from his tone it was going to be very serious.

'*Mon oncle?*' she answered lightly, waiting for him to continue.

'Your aunt, Madame Beaumarie, has doubtless told you, and indeed my own letters have done so too, that the time has come, Clémentine, for

a grave choice. You are going out into the world, Clémentine.'

A certain secular air about her words and ways—the keen appreciative merriment of her dark vivacious eyes—had told the old priest that Madame Beaumarie had been right. Thus far there was no sign of a 'vocation.' So, 'You are going out into the world,' he said again.

'It is what I have been longing for,' said Clémentine; and the old Curé's heart fell within him as he thought of the society of Orleans. He had so little sympathy with amusements, with 'pleasure,' contrived with any gaiety but that which was natural and spontaneous.

'My sister, Madame Beaumarie,' the Curé continued—in all these years of separated interests he had got to speak of her somewhat distantly—'will do her kindest for you, Clémentine. She will make a home for you, where you will not lack society. An old priest like myself probably undervalues the uses of Society—I mean that which is general and mixed. But your aunt is connected with very good families there at Orleans, and on the whole the arrangement will no doubt be a wise one. You are fortunate, Clémentine, having so few relations, to find one who will be very kind to you, and

will concern herself with your interests, and will—'

He hesitated a moment. He had thought it his duty to send the girl away in good hope as to her new life. He had been straining a point in praise of Madame Beaumarie, but his niece stopped him.

'I don't think I should like her very much,' said Clémentine, quietly. She was calmly recording an impression well formed before to-day.

'Not *like* her very much?' repeated old Monsieur Devallet, a little puzzled how to proceed. 'Then—*alors*, *mon enfant*, that is scarcely the mood in which to leave the convent: scarcely the mood—is it, my child?—in which to go to her.'

'Well, no!' answered the girl. 'I am afraid it is not. But I am going to *you*, if you please.'

'Clémentine!' said the old priest, in a tone of half incredulous surprise.

'Yes,' said the girl, with unshaken decision. She had thought before, when she had considered her choice, that even if she liked to go, it might be a worry or a burden to him. She must then of course have hesitated. She had known for herself before she had known for

him, and so until to-day she had been silent on her choice. But to-day she felt instinctively that he liked her already. He could soon get very fond of her, she thought. And she had her young French longing for quickly declared fondness, for demonstrative affection; and her aunt, without it, was repellent to her.

'I am a simple village curé,' said Monsieur Devallet at length; 'very dull, very lonely, and fast getting old.' He looked at her gently, and it was not within his heart to urge any more. He took her hand, and there was a silent minute. 'You shall come to me,' he continued, in a changed voice; 'free to go the moment you may wish.' And he was silent again for a little while. 'I am very touched — very touched, my child.' His voice shook a little with the gladness of his heart.

Soon afterwards he left her. A few days more and he would come back to fetch her away. Meanwhile there were preparations to make at Le Coudry — many things to be arranged in the small house. As the convent gates closed behind him, the old priest strode along the pavement with quicker and more elastic step. He was a little flushed at first at the decision. What a new interest in his life!

And what a sudden gift! He said a prayer to himself with more than common devoutness —with the vividness of feelings stagnant no more. The thought of the girl who was quite as a child to him, and of his henceforth different days, and of the brightened house in the village on La Beauce, filled his mind. He passed, preoccupied, through the clatter of Paris.

There were many things to prepare for Clémentine, besides the one guest-room, little used hitherto, in the small house with its walled garden, lost almost to sight among the great farm buildings of the village street—the immense cattle-sheds, the straw-covered bartons, the pointed-roofed granaries in whose long succession, close down the village street, was crammed much of the produce of those wide fields that stretched to the far horizon. The convent dress had of course to be laid aside—those gawky slipping aprons of brown stuff in which gracefulness can hardly be graceful. And a Parisian dressmaker, worthy to drape that pleasant figure of Clémentine's, was to make her her gowns, as many as she chose. The selection was all the girl's, but the work required time; and for a week, when the Curé went back to her from Le Coudry, priest and girl were lodged, with a

view to these preparations, at an old hotel in the Rue de Vaugirard, facing the Luxembourg.

That is really the girl's first taste of Paris, its movement and freedom. The quaint third-floor room, with windows looking on to the street and the omnibus station and the sentry-box of the Luxembourg, is a delight to her. There is a sense to her of companionship in the very noise of the town. The convent bedroom was one unbroken stillness. The great garden, generations old, shut it off from the presence of Paris. But here all night the uncertain noises came and went under her window, leaving her only pleasantly wakeful with the easy excitements of youth. Long afterwards, in that other quiet to which she was going—the quiet of the upland plain, and its nestling village with the low sound of bellowing cattle—would she remember the Paris night: the candles extinguished, the pleasant reflections of the street lamp shot upon wall and bed, the lessening of passing voices and feet, the slackening of traffic, the first sleeps, and then the brief waking, hardly less pleasant, when the hour of return from thirty theatres had sounded by the clock of the Luxembourg, and for one half-hour omnibuses rumbled and *coupés* flew, and all the clatter of the city had a little sweet excitement

for her unaccustomed ears. Afterwards, the later night—the night of Paris.

And then the day, busy with the congenial business of spending and acquiring! It is quite a levée that she holds—the young queen of her own freedom newly given—in that third-floor bedroom. Thither, up the wide high staircase of the hotel, comes the servant with letter already from some convent friend; comes the tripping dressmaker's girl, neat, black-dressed, and unbonneted, with attendant boy, with the wicker basket that contains the gown; comes the errand man with bonnet-box; comes respectfully the laundress's apprentice with fine linen and the washing bill; come one and all who minister in their small way to Clémentine's sense of new independence, and of the activities of common life. The convent, truly, was not the place for you, Clémentine. These quick black eyes and bounding pulses—it is a secular temperament.

But it is above all things variable; for now at home and settling into that quietness of life which no previous thought could realise, Clémentine is happy in the visible happiness of the old priest. He may idolise her soon, for he will perceive her pleasure in the happiness she

gives him, and will not remember that vanity may have its part in such pleasure ; for to see the happiness of another grow under the influence of your eyes and words and company, is to have, at least, whatever be your sacrifice or effort, the flattering sense of power.

And Clémentine, indeed, in that bare countryside, peopled sparely with peasants, was a unique thing. If the old Curé had himself had anything of vanity, he would have been vain of *her*. A less simple affection would have cherished and increased itself on the praise of others bestowed on the girl—as ours is wont to do, so often. But old Monsieur Devallet, as he trudged with his niece, in those early days, past the purple patches of clover and the blue-green of potato-field, from which bent figures of the labourer-folk rose to salute him, was quite without regard of what might be said in her praise. A long walk into Chartres, to show once and again to Clémentine the glory of that country—the immense and towering cathedral church, whose distant spires broke the horizon from every field of La Beauce —brought the girl into brief contact with people of her own rank, who looked and admired, and wondered who the two might be—Curé and girl. But no look or interest of any of them asw

noticed by the stalwart priest, black-robed, with flowing iron-grey hair, as he strode, pleasantly busy with explanation and answer, through cathedral aisle, or city street, or along the great road over the high plain. His life had been all too simple for a score of years, for pride in her. These petty natural vanities of our gregarious life, in towns, in watering-places, under the influence of men, are somehow lost in that elemental life of larger outlook because of slower and more tranquil thought, in the immense and silent plains, under the infinite sky.

Poor Clémentine! with her interests, her existence, now more confined than she had deemed possible, and her pretty dresses—visible sign of it—now out of place in the unchanged simplicities of the wide fields. The second Sunday she put them finally by; locked them up in her box with an undefined feeling of dullness—the first touch of reaction at the experience of some change which has not brought with it quite the expected pleasure. That day she trudged along the high-road by the Curé's side, in simple black—plain black stuff, plainly made. She might have been a London shop-girl, or a Parisian actress with some character to lose. We are to picture her so dressed—the lithe elastic figure

thus suitably arrayed—during the time, lesser or longer, in which she takes her walks, by many weathers, to cottage, farm, or church, across the fields, along the upland high-roads of La Beauce.

And Clémentine, being sensitive and French, fitted herself in other ways besides this small one, to a life of which it had been difficult to realise, before, the remoteness and seclusion. She had that fortunate and girlish quality—not all unselfish, as has been said already—of taking pleasure wherever she gave it. And she gave it to her uncle the Curé: perhaps to some of the people besides, who praised, and at all events liked her. But to enter at all intimately into lives so firmly set as theirs of La Beauce—lives cast once as it were in a common mould, and repeated without change or variety—that would have been no easy business. Beyond pleasant words and kindly thoughts, she and the peasants could hardly get, unless, indeed, by lapse of years; and even long years count as few to a peasantry little accustomed to form impressions swiftly, and with all its associations well defined and old, dating from childhood, and with its slow life led ever in sight of the permanence of Nature. With all this, that young, changing, quickly-touched life of hers could have little to do.

But at first the country itself, of which the spaciousness and freedom were a delight—the domesticities of that small home where she had arranged a room to her own bright taste—the pleasure that the old priest had in her, in hours of walking through the continuance of the fields, or sitting by the cosiness of lamplight over their evening meal with shutters closed against the darkness of deserted village street and far-stretching plain—at first these things in their very newness sufficed her; and she looked forward no more than did the Curé (wrapt in the contentment of the Present) to what might be her life in later years, when the need of some other life would surely declare itself. So time went on. Monsieur Devallet, in the tranquil occupation of his village work, and the new happiness of his leisure, thought of no other end than that, still distant, perhaps, which the old man would himself meet with a brave patience—his decrepitude and death—his later days, and his last.

Presently came letters from Madame Beaumarie at Orleans. '*The child will tire of your society, my dear brother. That is not all that she requires. That she fancies you more than me, I readily allow. Let us unite to find her some home more suited to her than either yours or my*

own. You live, my dear brother, in unusual isolation, and we must consider her future.'

Sensible it sounded. 'But there are difficulties —there are difficulties!' ejaculated the Curé in under-breath. 'I do not see at all how this is to be done. My child!'—aloud—'Do you tire of my company? You do not tire of your life here, Clémentine, *ma fille?*'

She said 'No' of course, and came to him to lay her hand on his head, for he was worried—the letter had brought him face to face for that moment with a question he was wishing to shrink from—and she looked first her brightest at him, and then tempered her voice in talk with him in a dozen changeful and delightful ways, with that immediate sensitive appreciation of the requirements of moment and mood which makes a French girl a comedian, and makes a comedian an artist. So that it was pleasant to him to think that all was well; and time could pass, and he could disregard the letter and its warning.

The town of Chartres itself, only a good walk's distance from Le Coudry, of course had interest for the girl—the grey and vast cathedral round which the black-winged birds sailed and settled in the upper air; the narrow winding streets from the Eure valley bringing one at

last to the great horse-shoe Place where market-stalls and bustling peasantry and townsfolk crowded on market days, and where three grand houses, inns now, but with the outside dignity of mansions under Louis Quatorze, faced each other in that open breathing-space of the town. The old Curé, with something of the learning of a man who had used studiously the leisure hours of a life without distractions, could talk instructively on peculiarities of the work of sculpture or of painted window; but for Clémentine the cathedral was most interesting when her thought of it was most vague. Its size and gloom gave it its fascination for her, and the remembrance that a score of generations had worshipped within those walls. All that impressed the imagination of youth. And Clémentine had a keener zest for personal experience than for the reception of facts.

At length, in August, the quiet and narrow house at Le Coudry, shut in by its walled garden from neighbouring barton, farm, and cattle-shed, received a new visitor. The Curé had known only distantly before of the existence of a man who looked to him just like five thousand that might be met in Paris—Adrien Roquette, a youth to the Curé, who lacked to the Curé

the charm of youth, as much as the interest of maturity. Madame Beaumarie at Orleans had some slight knowledge of him, since he had been there once to see her. He was the son of a warm friend of Clémentine's father, and was now a visitor at Chartres. A master of his means, such as they were—never taken at disadvantage when taken unawares—he annoyed Monsieur Devallet with his easy and voluble politeness. Along with his smooth city face and fashionable garments, he seemed to bring the clatter of the Boulevard into the quietude of the upland village. Honestly, the Curé would have been glad to see him, if only for the sake of his niece, had there been possibility of sympathy between them. But between that slow grave man, weighted and wise—a little restricted perhaps by the lonely monotonous years of his village service—and this quick chatterer of Paris street and club, who came with news of the theatres, with opinions of operas, with rumour of café and gossip of green-room, how could there be much in common?

And yet Adrien seemed a good-tempered fellow, and it was right to be civil to him, whatever might be the reason of his visits. Besides, he had been born, promptly discovered

Clémentine, with some natural liking for beautiful things. He might perhaps be selfish in his life, but he was not altogether gross. And he brought some element of youth into Clémentine's career of inexperienced loneliness. Again, he was really a good-looking fellow, dressed carefully by Dusautoy, or Laurent Richard: a happy work of Nature and Art in his small way, and pleasanter therefore to Clémentine than to the Curé.

It was plain that in his love for beautiful things he admired Clémentine. He had admired in Paris the Concierge's daughter, who was a painter's model, and Madame Ruinart of the Variétés, and Mademoiselle Adèle of the Bois de Boulogne. All these admirations had come, and had gone. Now when Clémentine herself should admire any one, it might well be that the admiration would not be exalted. Her nature, pleasantly secular, did not tend to the ideal. But at all events, with her, the thing would be absorbing. She would love once, with the youth of her spirit.

So they were dangerous, thought the Curé—these visits in which much might be looked, when little was said. He began to blame himself. Presently, Adrien Roquette opened his

mind to Monsieur Devallet. The girl was in the house—reading in the little room which had been so pleasantly planned for her: the nest from which, almost without knowing it, she might some day be wishing to fly. The old man, matins long ago said in the little upland chapel, was enjoying in quiet his long morning's leisure. He is picking leaves from his peach-trees on the wall side; the fruit is ripening well in the late summer time, in the long day of sun. The door in the garden-wall opens, and Adrien Roquette makes straight for the Curé. Old Monsieur Devallet is genial to all men. He inspires confidence and generally accords it. And though he cannot like the young Parisian very much, the young Parisian must needs at least like him. There is a certain dignity with sweetness and restraint, which a man must be wholly bad not to like in another, and wish for himself. And young Monsieur Roquette, who is not slow to perceive, takes the Curé, as he takes the niece, into the list of his admirations, which began with Ruinart of the Variétés, and has thus far ended with Adèle of the Bois.

And now the September sun of La Beauce glows happily on garden, fruit, and flower of that secluded spot, as the old thick-shoed Curé,

turning from his peach-trees, lifts his low hat in courteous slowness to the young man as he enters the garden.

'We shall be alone?' asks the young man, in a minute.

'Certainly. We can certainly continue to be,' answers the old priest, accustomed to confidences, but with a touch of instinctive shrinking from the confidence that is to come.

'I have paid you many visits,' says the young man respectfully, as venturing to chronicle a fact which may possibly be significant. And then he pauses, waiting the Curé's pleasure.

'I am an old man,' replies Monsieur Devallet, with a kindly smile, that is yet not quite cheerful; 'and it is the first time that a young gentleman of Paris is so attentive to me.'

He waits a minute, and both men have now allowed themselves to put on their hats again; and the Curé takes half-a-dozen slow paces under the garden wall, the young man following at his side.

'I have come to speak to you about your niece,' says Monsieur Roquette.

The Curé has no look of surprise; a shade, perhaps, of realised disappointment. It might perhaps *not* have come, this dreaded request;

but he could not persuade himself that it was wholly unexpected. And Monsieur Roquette continues :

'My dear sir, I am informed of Mademoiselle Clémentine's position, and you are aware of mine. You are so prudent a guardian that you would hardly have allowed my calls thus far, if you had intended to oppose my wishes. But Mademoiselle Clémentine's consent—'

'Dear sir,' answered the Curé, 'I do not know anything about it. I *do* know that I am in no hurry whatever to get my niece married. It is a bad system, a bad teaching, my dear sir,'—he went on, with an air of conviction,—'that places marriage before girls as the prize of life, or as their inevitable fate. That is not my teaching at all; though, because I am a patriot, I do say sometimes to these village people, "My children, we must give children to France."'

'For a respectable woman,' said young Monsieur Roquette, 'I see nothing but the convent or marriage.'

'I do not make that restriction "for a respectable woman," because I do not concern myself with any other,' rejoined the Curé.

The young man looked at him in surprise.

'I do not mean that I am exclusive,' he added,

'here in my village on La Beauce. Faults we have, failings we have—we have *sins*. But I do not like such expressions as a woman who is "respectable," "a woman who is *comme il faut*." For me, every woman is respectable, because I respect womanhood; but I am perhaps more fortunate than some persons, in living in the midst of a population that has kept the religious sentiment.'

'In Paris, we always think the country is ideal,' said the young man, wishing to humour him.

But the Curé's face kept a certain reticence—an expression of mental separation—and he only answered slowly,

'Devils rise also out of the silence of the fields.'

'Do you happen to know,' asked the young man, now convinced that it was better for the conversation to be narrowly practical, 'whether I am personally disagreeable to Mademoiselle Clémentine?'

'Why do you wish to marry her?' retorted the Curé, parrying the question, after a minute's silence, in which he had recalled to himself only too surely the signs that Adrien counted for much with Clémentine already.

'There are several reasons,' answered the young man promptly. 'I admire her greatly.'

'You are a young Parisian,' remarked the old priest, in a dry quietude of tone which implied that that first reason could hardly be sufficient. He had had many opportunities of 'admiring.'

'You mean that Mademoiselle Clémentine has money at her disposal, and that when I came here first I had only once seen her, and that by chance and in Paris. That is what you wish to hint, very politely, and it is perfectly true. But I admire Mademoiselle Clémentine excessively. I think Mademoiselle a very exquisite young girl, who in a year or two of married life would become one of the most delightful of young women of the world. Her fortune, again, though not large, is sufficient for me. And, more than that, it was my father who wished me to marry her.'

'How was that?' said the Curé, beginning to take an interest, against his inclination.

'The money-business, in which I am, was established by my father—and you know it was your late brother, my dear sir, the father of Mademoiselle Clémentine, who helped him—started him in it. My father never forgot the obligations of friendship; and I who am a

Frenchman, have desired not to forget the obligations of a son.' How proper he looked when he made his little speech, and followed it by a silence meant to be telling.

How should the Curé deal with the difficulty? He did not like the man, and had not the heart to discuss the question with him. In past times—had such a question arisen—he would certainly have applied himself to it. He would have grappled with the difficulty. But there was growing on him now, with his well-nigh seventy years, that love of procrastination which belongs to the old, who have no time to procrastinate. So, after pacing the garden two or three times quietly, he looked up at the young man with an air of relief, and said with an expression as of a thing satisfactorily settled—'Well, you have made me aware of your intentions.'

It was indeed sufficiently obvious that the young man had done so. So he waited for more to be vouchsafed. But they were at the garden-gate. Arrived there, a man less simple than old Monsieur Devallet—a man to whom the resources of a man of the world came constantly and not at rare moments—would have grasped the other's hand, followed up the advan-

tage of the first procrastination, and sent the other away cordially, with nothing promised, and with the whole business to be begun again. But the slow, steady, stalwart Curé was too simple for that. He was willing after all to accept the initiative of the delay. And he said as he opened the door in the garden-wall, 'I shall ask you to absent yourself for a month, or thereabouts. I do not wish to be uncourteous. But I am not ready—I really am not at all ready—to say anything more for the present. My niece is very much to me. It is a great responsibility. I cannot be hurried. Remember, sir, there are *many* questions to consider. You will understand that the marriage of my niece must be the gravest act of my later years. I must take time, even to meditate a refusal.'

And the young man, perhaps with a touch of dignified indifference, yet by no means wholly false, walked briskly away to Chartres, and the train for Paris. And the old man, with his mind crossed by the shadow of loss or disturbance, went back to his garden peach-trees and to uneasy leisure—the pleasantness of leisure being so wholly gone.

That was the beginning of September. A

whole month was to pass. And the first evening, turning round from the little piano newly installed in those hitherto silent quarters, Clémentine asked him,—Well, had he seen anyone to-day?

Of course he had seen some of his village folk. He had stood for a quarter of an hour out in the clover-fields, chatting to the brown-faced peasant-woman, who was cutting her apron full of clover for the rabbits. The two-wheeled cart from a near farm had pulled up on the high-road by the solitary cross upon the plains—he had said a few words to the driving farmer and his wife on the return from market. They had grumbled at the town dues—two sous for every fowl the farmer took at the bottom of the cart into the town of Chartres. But that was not what Clémentine meant. And he knew it was not, though doubtless she was not thinking of the particular visit he had received. She had been busy at the moment, and could not have known of it; and had she known, her French girl's reticence, on things that concern men, would have prevented her from asking.

But as she had put the question very simply, he was bound to tell her the truth. If he did not do so, there would be the beginning of

secrets he must keep from her—things which she might not share. He had had secrets all his life: as a priest he was used to keep them. But that gave perhaps only greater strength to his desire that all his dealings with Clémentine should be open and plain for her. Something of that thought went through his mind as he pondered.

'Yes, I have seen *la mère Marguéry*, and Grossetête and his wife, and Quinet, the blacksmith, down in the valley—and young Monsieur Roquette.'

He looked at her closely, though not too keenly, as he spoke. It was only half a minute, but she blushed before turning to the piano. Nothing was said; her very reticence told her story; and as she struck the keyboard again, and the notes of an intricate waltz of Chopin, that nobody ever danced to, filled the little room with its resonant music—in which she made several mistakes—the old man's heart sunk within him. Simple as his life had been, he had not lived his well-nigh seventy years for nothing. The many thoughts and the amassed experiences of all that life gave him at times a certain rapidity in insight which served him instead of cleverness. He could never have

made a bargain, have become a merchant or a diplomatist; but in all those years of country priesthood he had thought, reflected, judged; and in questions of the human heart he saw to the end of the thing. What he recognised now was, that the man not being visibly bad, and the girl being plainly fascinated, there was only one end possible—they must have their way.

Remonstrance, opposition, compulsion even—yes, indeed, there might be all that; but how far all that would be from his plan!—his plan that the girl, almost a child to him, should love and trust him, and that their will should be a will in common. She should see with him, or he with her. It did not perhaps so much matter which, so that she gave him that almost filial love which the lonely life had craved for.

But there were her interests—her interests after all. These at least must be guarded. He would urge upon her, reason and thoughtfulness—no claim of his own: that was quite past: no word to recall how if marriage came so soon she would in great part be lost to him, after a time that had been too brief—yes, but a time perhaps that could not happily have lasted.

He got up from his one of the two seats of

state and comfort in his village Curé's parlour—the Louis Quatorze chairs, with yellow velvet, faded almost to straw-colour—walked to the marqueterie bureau at the other end of the room, back again behind Clémentine and the piano, as that waltz of Chopin was jigging its cruel triumph; so backwards and forwards a turn or two, and then into the chair again. He stretched his black and tightly covered legs, settled his elbows on the chair-arms, joined the finger tips of his two hands together.

'Clémentine—*fillette!*'

It was over now, the music; and the swift accurate hands brought down the lid of the piano with a neat sharpness. There are two ways of doing everything, even shutting a piano, and Clémentine's was the pretty way; and the girl had swung herself round her chair-seat, and now, while she sat sideways to listen, her arms were on the chair-back, and her head bent forward. So they faced each other, priest and girl; the girl simply waiting; the old Curé, with a touch of hesitation, nervousness almost, about the lines of the mouth. With a lonely life, and little experience, as he thought, and advancing years, he did not trust himself very much, now that he had to face, not the

light Paris youth he was indifferent to, but the girl who was nearly all to him.

'I have wondered sometimes, Clémentine, whether, after all the companionship of the convent, you could settle down here, placidly and restfully. We are very fond of each other. . . . . But I do not think you can.'

'*Oh! mon oncle!*'

By way of deprecation and protest she exclaimed it. But it was the first touch of falseness: with kindness at the root of it, she would fain have persuaded herself. But she knew it was something of an acted lie with which she faced the Curé. She would like to have turned round to the piano again. A pressing need of Chopin's music at her fingertips—through all her mind and body—and a trying question shirked for the time.

'Monsieur Roquette was here to-day,' continued the Curé, who had sadly registered the half-sincerity of '*Oh! mon oncle!*' 'He was here to propose to me that you should be his wife.'

The Curé got up from his chair and ceased to look at her; several times he paced the room.

'We will not talk very much about it to-

night,' he added. 'I daresay, Clémentine, you do not know your own mind.'

'No, *mon oncle!*' That was sincere at all events, as well as dutiful. It was sincere and grave.

'I have thought lately, in observing you, I have perhaps allowed you too much liberty.' She and Monsieur Roquette had been alone together for fourteen minutes; but in the eyes of a man of ancient fashions, that may be 'too much liberty.' 'You have seen in one way or another something of this young man, and of him only. I ought perhaps to reproach myself for permitting customs which are unhealthy. In general society, in "the great world," it might be different. If a girl profits by choice at all—and possibly she does, our old French habits notwithstanding—it must be a *sufficient* choice. . . . . This young man—no, I will not conceal it from you—is not all that I should wish. I ask myself, note it well, Clémentine, not "*Does* he love you?" but "*Will* he love you?" . . . . I daresay I should be exacting on your behalf. But, Clémentine, you must yourself be grave, not rash. You may leave me, my dear child, at the first moment, when it comes—the true time—but

you will not leave me lightly. They tell me that in England they marry for the Present. I do not know; but in France we marry for the Future. I would rather not say anything more to-night.' And he kissed her. Her eyes were steadfast, grave, and brooding. 'Good-night, Clémentine.'

After that, he watched her behaviour closely for a week—watched her dutiful, quiet, pre-occupied, the early restlessness gone—and that story which the one look and one blush had told him, was told him a hundred times.

So he sends for Monsieur Roquette sooner than he has meant to do. It is found that there is nothing very visibly against him. It is the middle of September, and the young man is here again—Bourse speculations left by him for a day or two: manœuvrings of the 'rise' and 'fall' confided to the hands of a substitute, and the young man willing, nay, somewhat desirous, to renew his suit. He fulfils his promise to his dead father; he possesses himself of money which will make speculation more easy; and he marries a girl whom he knows, pretty soon, as well as it is given to him to know women. What he knows is, that she is graceful and good-natured, gentle and bright.

She is very much in love with him—perhaps for want of some knowledge of a better—and it is soon all settled as he wishes ; and the two, with the guardian Curé, who, before many months, must part with Clémentine, trudge for a day or two, during Adrien's stay at Le Coudry, over the country and into the town of Chartres. There are the sights to see—will not Monsieur Roquette see the great enamels?—Léonard le Limosin's, in the Church of Saint Pierre. Perhaps Monsieur Roquette is not all that is admirable ; but Clémentine does not know it, for he seems to promise the sympathy of youth. How different now the house is—the quiet little house —with his step in it ! How cheerful to hear his voice in talk with the Curé at breakfast-time ! The knowledge of his presence gives the village life, and the dull plain becomes companionable. And he himself—how can he not be moved by the ingenuous spectacle of her frank friendship and prompt love?

They have pleasant days together. One day, it is the day of a great pilgrimage to the special chapel of Our Lady of Chartres—a side chapel in the immense cathedral : an altar raised in honour of one who wrought, they say, wonders of healing long ago. The faithful and the curious

flock in numbers so great that it is a sight to see. They come, men, women, children even, from all the scattered villages of the immense upland ; and peasants from the vineyards of La Brie, that stretches beyond Paris, and from La Perche, the orchard-country that lies towards Normandy, and from La Sologne, the marsh lands over the Loire—by Orleans, Gien and the South—meet the corn farmers of La Beauce under the great church whose towers are sign and landmark to every villager of the plain. The banner-hung streets are full of a great procession. Children, women, monks of many orders, the village priests, each with his following troop, the higher dignitaries, Monseigneur himself—these with banners and blessings carry in triumph through Chartres, the town's great relic, known far and wide to Catholic France, the holy vestment, *la sainte tunique*, which was once the Virgin's own.

Even our old Curé almost waxes enthusiastic. 'It is such a display of faith,' he says : 'France has kept the religious sentiment.' There is expectation of Miracle. The sceptic may perhaps be confounded, as at Salette, and at Lourdes, and at Paray-le-Monial. But no! The sceptic is convinced that it is too near Paris : miracles

may hardly happen in the places to which a man of science can take a return ticket and be back by dinner-time.

All the four bells of Chartres, and the Bourdon to boot, have pealed their welcome to the pilgrims. What the bells are—these famous bells of an immense age—Clémentine can tell to Adrien. They are christened bells, all of them —Anne, Elisabeth, Fulbert, and Piat—and each has his own service. At a funeral of the very poor, one thin sound rings out: it is the humble Piat: two francs the charge for him. Fulbert will cost you three; Elisabeth six, for burial or marriage. Anne is the greatest, and you may ring her alone or in concert with one or two of the others, or ring all together. Ringers and fees are elaborately organised; and rank, consideration, eminence in Chartres, hang somewhat on the bells you ask for, for marriage or burial. Clémentine, who did not know, like her uncle, the changes wrought in fourteenth century Gothic, and was weak in her criticism of the sculptures for which Chartres is famous, and wondered what was beautiful in the enamels by the great man of Limoges, found a touch of what seemed intimate associations with many lives and various fortunes in all that scheme duly

printed on the back of the church door, for the ringing and paying the four bells of Chartres.

One pleasant day—more pleasant days than one—went by for the young. Clémentine was in love, yet the stir of the pilgrimage gave a little new excitement to that secular heart, which asked, almost without knowing it, for life and the world. Her uncle saw all that; recognised it late, perhaps, when consent had been given to an union which could hardly develope her—feared how life would be with her when the present sweetness of hope was over, and no guiding hand led that inexperience through difficult ways. He began then to reproach himself: quietly, secretly, but almost bitterly. He would like to have kept her to himself; he *should* have sent her betimes into the world, and then, surrounded by a wise care, so slight a thing as Adrien Roquette would have had no charm for her. She had imagination, feeling, longing no doubt for life less dull and experience more varied than that of the village presbytery, the upland church, the village and its farm-work, and the unbroken plain. But why because of that—the Curé now asked himself with foreboding—ally herself with this weak thing?—a something that you touch and break, a toy of an

hour, a gimcrack of the Palais Royal, a thing of uselessness, an *article de Paris!*

Once or twice this *article de Paris* felt her charm, the charm at all events of her face when he came on it unawares. Roquette arrived one day—it was the first of October—at an unexpected hour, meaning to pay a visit at Oisème, on someone whom he knew there, before walking south to Le Coudry. Oisème is a village not larger than Le Coudry, but quite different, and there was one great house in it: his friend's: a true *maison de campagne*, with garden, terrace, and tall trees. It was the first time that Roquette was at Oisème, and in that golden afternoon, with summer lingering, he seemed to have fallen suddenly out of the bare upland on an enchanted land of garden and stream. The little valley, into which by almost unperceived degrees his steps had brought him, had nothing to recall the great bare plain of all that country. The sun itself, which struck still strongly on the unprotected upland, gleamed quietly here as with a genial visitation, and passed its level light through boughs and greenery and over the clustered hayricks and brown cottage roofs. A winding line of thin slight lime-trees, hardly touched as yet with

autumn, edged the winding road, and beyond them, by the path-side too, a brook, now shallow with dryness of weather, gurgled on its long low course among the pebbles and weed flowers. Three paths suddenly met where the tiny valley was lowest, and there was nothing seen around but the sun-touched tree boughs, moved a little in the afternoon breeze, and above them, and through them, the calm sky. It was a very nest of quietness and peace, and there was Clémentine—discovered suddenly—with head bent over a small note-book, as she sat on a felled tree trunk. Walking thus far, she had stopped to jot down, amateur fashion, the picturesqueness of the village well, with its pent-house and bucket. She sketched badly. But what did that matter? Even to Adrien Roquette, had he *not* been her affianced lover, she would have seemed most perfectly to fit the scene, to emphasise and complete it. The moment with its light and silence had a sweetness of its own, which could hardly return again. It was one of those benedictions thrown liberally on men, whether they heed them or ignore.

Adrien, still fresh from the petty excitements of Paris and the bustle of the Bourse, had senti-

ment enough to be made a little happier by so pleasant a time. He could still be attracted, and Clémentine had never, he thought, looked so delightful, for her face had flushed into pleasure at seeing him, only after he had had time to note already the immense calm of her solitude. He was not the man to value her, to lead her, to make the most of her so various moods ; but all that the unspoilt girlhood of France possesses of tender and restrained, of '*recueilli et retenu*,' had been, before she recognised him, in the placid contentment of her eyes. And now the eyes, dark, with the softness and abstraction of solitude not quite gone out of them, looked at him steadily, with the unapproachable candour and directness of the very simple and the very young.

With all his lightness and his flippancy, he was a lover of beautiful things, and, moved rightly for the moment, he did not make to her any conventional exclamation of pleasure or surprise. For a minute after she saw him, he said nothing. Then, in a tone that was quite happy, 'What was I thinking of?'

She shook her head, smiling and gratified—how could she tell ?

'*Vous êtes bien douce*,' he said, with unwonted

feeling. 'Clémentine, you are very sweet: you are more exquisite than I thought.'

If the two—risen to their best moments—moments of shared happiness and pleasant things—the best for such as they—if the two risen to their best moments, could but keep them!

Then, one month afterwards, there was the marriage; first, at the Mairie of Chartres, the civil marriage; then at the Cathedral, the ceremony and the blessing—'Piat,' 'Fulbert,' 'Elisabeth,' 'Anne,' making their happy play high up in the tower.

Clémentine and the Curé had never been so much at one as in those weeks before the parting. The old man took her, more regularly then than before, on many a round, in the autumn weather, past farm and cloverfield and small scanty orchard that held its head up timidly it seemed, against the winds of the plain. Afterwards there was the growing dusk, the lamp Clémentine lighted, the two armchairs set face to face at the small round table at dinner, the shuttered room, the noise of heavy feet—some home-going peasant tramping down the village road—the wood fire, when the October evening freshened, the stray bits of music, the

game of *piquet* last of all,—all the simple and everyday companionship, sweeter and more sweet as it drew on towards its close.

They sat very silent the last night before the wedding, after Adrien and his friends, light of heart and civil and free of speech, had gone back to the inn in the town. The old man would not perhaps have felt the parting quite so keenly had he in early life or middle life known the daily pleasure of that intimate companionship. He had only known the lack of it. Now, of course, she would come often to see him. She had said so, and had meant it. But all these promises for the future counted but for little with the old man. People deceive themselves with the like of them. He knew for himself that a stage was passed: it was no use trying to be persuaded that the altered circumstance did not mean altered life, feelings perhaps gradually and subtly estranged.

Having to rise so early to say his Mass, at seven o'clock, in the chapel by the highroad on the edge of the plain, Monsieur Devallet was used to go to bed betimes. At ten o'clock Clémentine said Good-night, and his servant having gone before, he followed a minute afterwards; the last, even then, of all the dwellers in

that village cluster of cottage and farm. But this last night he did not go so quickly; and Clémentine, undressing slowly, with busy thoughts about the morrow—nay, not really undressing at all, but putting on before the looking-glass a pretty gown of twelve months ago in which she had elected to be married—wondered why she had not heard, as usual, his step on the stair; and after half-an-hour she decided to go and summon him. Then she heard him come upstairs, but for a minute only, and then go down again. Soon afterwards she followed him. The pretty gown was still on her, and might wisely indeed be worn at the wedding, for its rich simplicity was work of art that could not pass out of fashion to-morrow. With that she entered into the parlour.

When she had first gone upstairs to bed he had paced up and down the little room. His eye had fallen on the piano: on the cards and cardbox for their evening game of *piquet*, which were allowed to lie always on the corner of the mantel-shelf. He had gone up to the piano and locked it, for the first time since it had been in the house. He had taken the cards and cardbox in his hand, and had mounted the stairs, and there, in a little cabinet where he kept chiefly

such papers as were important to him—a few old letters, and letters of hers from the convent, and certain family treasures which had been untouched some forty years—there he locked up safely—as if they were treasures, too—card, card-box, piano key.

Then, going downstairs again, at an unwonted hour, he had taken from a book-shelf his volume of Bossuet, and seating himself gravely before the ash-white logs, now burnt thin and low indeed, but enough for him to-night, he had drawn the lamp to where it had been used to stand for him alone, and had opened the book, and—while Clémentine, before the mirror upstairs, was looking happily at her gown — had resumed the solitary life which must needs at all events return with the morrow. For him, in fact, much as for Bossuet, '*les restes d'une voix qui tombe, et d'une ardeur qui s'éteint.*'

Now the door opened—Clémentine appeared. Yes, he was reading.

'Remember to-morrow, *mon oncle!*' she cheerfully exclaimed. 'Will you not go upstairs?'

'I have locked the piano,' he said, looking at her and rising.

'Why?' she asked, glancing round quickly, and seeing that the mantel-shelf was bare of

cards and card-box in their accustomed place. Without an answer then, she saw his face, and understood. She went up to him tenderly, and took his hand. 'Yes,' she said, speaking now slowly, in the one perfect tone of all the pleasant ones of that changeful voice: 'you do love me very much!'

There was a recognition that repaid him in the tone. It was their last word that night. And the morrow was the happy day—the day of the bustle of marriage.

Six months passed, and then she came to him. Her husband was busy in Paris. They lived in an apartment in the Chaussée d'Antin, in the full movement of the capital. Business and pleasure were more and more engrossing. She saw little of Adrien. The Curé was begged to come up to Paris—but how could he do it?—to snatch a week from the country work, and see a little of that bustling world of the Paris of Finance—restless action, life busy with 'rise' and 'fall,' happiness hanging on a turn of the Bourse, money made so as to purchase display, and display purchased to make more money. A world in which steadier heads than Adrien Roquette's are lost every morning.

Six months more, and she was with him again; the autumn, that reminded him of the parting, having again returned. She looked older by three or four years; spoke little of 'Monsieur Roquette'; talked of return to Paris almost as if she were tired of it. Was she at least happy? 'Oh yes,'—with half a heart.

Could it be that the Curé's sadness had had something prophetic in it? Except in a moment of selfish fondness, the mere parting would not have been so mournful a thing. Had he not divined what he could not express, and felt what he could not persuade her—that the marriage was like Juliet's contract, 'too rash, too unadvised, too sudden?' He did not seek to press on her useless questions; if there was anything still undefined, better far not to define it. But he blamed himself constantly now, for his whole mistaken plan of a life for her.

Property of the girl's was suddenly sold to meet demands on Adrien Roquette; business demands that must immediately be satisfied. Clémentine, made aware of them, chose with her common promptitude. The money should go, to bring more money back, though the husband was no more to her what he was a year ago.

Monsieur Roquette now held, in his distant

intercourse with her, that none of the expenses which perhaps had begun by being pleasures could safely be curtailed now that they were not pleasures, but advertisements. Every evening his wife must be at the Opera; every afternoon she was sent to drive in the Bois, and in a new carriage of Binder's, and behind horses had over from Tattersall's. Older so much, in one short year or two, she could understand, now, that she was not leading a life—the life she wanted, of shared pleasure—but playing a part: an actress in a scene.

At last, ruin came, finding Clémentine stricken down with the commotion of the house—the old Curé arriving to fetch her away—finding Adrien Roquette white with disaster, talking of pistols and poison to begin with, but settling to every-day manners, and finishing up with a party of pleasure, while drawing-room furniture was seized for debts. Clémentine journeyed with Monsieur Devallet to Le Coudry. And Adrien tottered merrily down the Boulevard in the evening. His friends had promised that he should start again, and, in Finance, he might lose two fortunes, yet make a third and keep it.

Again, for Clémentine, alone, and ill by this time with the mental and physical trouble that

her hard bright life in Paris has been preparing for her—again for her, so long as she is strong enough to get to it, the quietude, the silence of the plain. Summer now—the long days when the steady sun, the friend of all the peasants, shines from morning till evening on the cornfields. Waggons and implements are made ready for harvest. There are the signs of coming activity in the village street. The quiet presbytery again for Clémentine: the chair placed for her in the garden. And the peaceful Sunday, when the thin-voiced bell, pulled by the blue-bloused sacristan in the upland chapel, calls the farm-folk, the white-capped peasantry, together, by all their paths of the plain. The two-wheeled coburg, with its time-worn dull black leather head, makes its slow jogging way across the immense tableland: the white geese, with the goose-keeper, move, straggling over the fields.

Roquette sees Clémentine hurriedly—yes, she is very ill. He manages to send down, for half-an-hour, a famous man from Paris, a physician, who examines briefly, and gives directions, looks at his watch and catches the next train: 'cases' as bad as Clémentine's, and griefs more important than the Curé's, waiting him in Paris.

One day it is over.

She had said one night, in the weakness of just passing delirium, 'Not the great bell! Only Fulbert, which is next to the paupers.' Strange fancy—the Curé guessed—a fancy that she lay at Chartres, and must be buried there. That was soon over. She recognised the Curé later on, and knew she was again in the familiar village; and held his hand in token of great kindness—of the one faithful love her life had known. Death came to her gently.

Three days afterwards, they buried her—the Curé and the sacristan and the village folk and the husband from Paris—in the churchyard of Le Coudry, opposite the big door to the west, by which priest and sacristan, children and farmer folk, go in on the Sunday.

* * * *

After a second bankruptcy, Adrien Roquette, aided by his friends, did really make a fortune rapidly. Then he came down to Chartres, radiant in his prosperity, when Clémentine lay quietly in the churchyard of Le Coudry. 'Yes, it was very terrible,' he hastened to say; strange things had happened to him. What trouble he had had! Who could have foreseen

it? And poor Clémentine! But in speculation you lose two fortunes, you know, before you can keep a third.

And old Monsieur Devallet?

Seventy-four; firm seemingly as years ago; flowing hair still iron grey; lines softened and saddened about the mouth—just so the stranger sees him, who walks out from Chartres some Sunday, as I said at the beginning. The old Curé is carrying still with him his lonely sorrow, which is more than expiation; and carrying it with him to the end, whenever end may be. There comes as yet no change nor break. His days vary but with the seasons. The prayer, trudged to betimes in sunny hours of the summer morning, or in the snows of winter; the visits to the hillside farm, on very sick or very old: baptism; burial; the hours of reading the familiar books; the pacing of the narrow garden—all the permitted, the now possible pleasure—all the repeated task-work, uninspired and dull, of that quite solitary life.

Seventy-four!

Blois, October, 1876—*London, January*, 1877.

RENUNCIATIONS

A CHEMIST IN THE SUBURBS

A CHEMIST IN THE SUBURBS

I

Richard Pelse was the chemist. The suburb was near the 'Angel'; at the top of the City Road; on the confines of Islington. There he led his prosaic life—getting old, and a bachelor. But into the prosaic years—years before Islington—there had burst once the moment of Romance. Then his shop was near Oxford Street. Into the sitting-room over it there had come, one evening, for an hour, the lady of his dream. Unexpectedly; suddenly. She had drawn her chair, by his own, to the fire. They had sat together so; and he had been happy. She had given him his tea; had opened his piano; had played, a while, Xaver Scharwenka's wild music; had kissed him once; and had gone away.

Perhaps his years before and after had seemed

at times two deserts, divided by that living stream which was her momentary presence. Or perhaps there was an outstretched darkness on one side of the heavens; then a star; then again outstretched darkness—the life of the shop and the suburb.

Richard Pelse was one of those poor men who are born cultivated: one of the cultivated who are born poor. You had only to look at him now, across the counter and the ranged tooth-powder pots—to see the clear-cut head, against its background of dry drug jars and Latin-labelled drawers — 'Alumens;' 'Flor: Sul;' 'Pot: Bitar;' 'Cap: Papav'—to know that he was individual. A sympathetic spectator might have called him original; an unsympathetic, eccentric. What fires burnt in the brownness of his quick, keen, restless eyes? What had left his face—not yet really old—topped with a mass of silvery-white hair? There were the delicate features, decisive and refined; the nose aquiline; the kindly mouth with nervous movement at its corners. And, again, the hands—thin and white and long: with fingers and thumbs turning back prodigiously: flexible, subtle, sensitive. And the spare figure, still quite straight, dressed in the black frock-coat

of his business hours. Original or eccentric: a man whom men and women looked at: either liked or feared.

At home for years within a stone's throw of the 'Angel,' he had all his life been a Londoner. Energy and diligence he had from his boyhood, but country colour had never come into his cheeks; no robustness of the sea's giving, into his frame. All his pursuits were of the town—and nearly all his recollections. His mother was a widowed little news-agent —a withered woman, once pretty and vivacious —who kept, when he was a child and a lad, her newspaper-shop in a by-way, two doors from North Audley Street. His father? He never knew him.

When he was twelve years old his mother died, and a customer of theirs, a druggist of the quarter, took him as 'useful boy.' Had he ever changed, and risen, so far afterwards as to be a famous physician, it would have been told of him, in pride, or as astonishing, that he had been an errand-boy only. As it was, he had in fact been that, but something besides. He was so intelligent that gradually he had got into all the work of the shop. He was civil, and comely too. From selling things

behind the counter, he was put into the dispensary. He educated himself; he passed his examinations; he became an assistant who was entirely necessary; then he became a partner. At thirty-five he was a prosperous man and alone; the shop's earlier master having retired. For Richard Pelse, before that happened, there had been twenty years of progress, and of self-denial; no doubt of satisfactory, but of unremitting work. Then he allowed himself a holiday, and with a valise by his side and a 'Baedeker' in his pocket, started for Switzerland and Savoy.

II

Mr Pelse had made more than half his tour and had got over his surprises, the sense of all that was strange, when he found himself, one Sunday, arrived at Aix-les-Bains for two days' rest, and for the charm of its beauty. He had intended to go, rather modestly, to the Hôtel de la Poste. But when the omnibus pulled up, opposite it, in the Place, the landlady, rushing out breathless and busy, announced that the house was full. 'Allez à l'Hôtel Vénat,' she immediately recommended. Then, having seen

at a glance that the traveller was an Englishman, 'Hôtel Vénat *et Bristol*,' she added, by way of encouragement, 'Vénat *et Bristol*,' and everything was right.

It was there that Mr Pelse stayed. Though a tradesman, he had tact as well as education; various interests and real kindliness. He could mix quite easily with 'his betters'—found his 'betters' much more his equals than his neighbours had been. At the Vénat, an argument with an English chaplain brought him into contact with a family of three—Colonel Image, a military politician, very well connected, and busy in the House; and his wife, who was above all things fashionable; and his daughter, who was blonde and nineteen.

Richard Pelse must certainly then, with all his earlier deficiencies and disadvantages, have been picturesque, and almost elegant, as well as interesting. The impulsive Miss Image found him so. In the garden, from his ground-floor bedroom, there had been a vision of a tall white figure, of floating muslin, of pale-coloured hair. Nearer, there were seen dancing eyes, large and grey, and a mouth that was Cupid's bow. At *table d'hôte* there was heard the voice that he liked best, and liked at once. A voice? Hardly.

An instrument of music. You listened to it as to a well-used violin.

In the drawing-room he got into talk with her. Was she not, unexpectedly, the ideal realised?—the lady of the dream of all his youth.

But that night he reflected on the distance between them. He was no ambitious snob, scheming for marriage in a sphere not his. The distance—the distance! No, there could never be marriage, or his career must change first. Should he leave to-morrow, and forget the encounter? Should he enjoy her for three days, and forget her then instead, or hug the memory? At all events, he did not go.

And on both sides, in the short three days—prolonged to four and five—there was interest and fascination. Perhaps he should have told her father who he was. Instead of it, he told her. There was a recoil then—and it might have saved them. Her knowledge of the world and of the *convenances*—nineteen, but bred in Society — was suddenly uppermost. Nothing more could be said to him, and she would mention to her mother as a piece of gossip to be heard and forgotten—as the amusing adventure of travelling and chance acquaintance—that the man was a shopkeeper, a chemist; might

have sold her sponges, nail brushes, Eau de Cologne. Then the simplicity, the naturalness, warmth, impulsiveness—which were in her too—came uppermost in their turn. She would tell none of that. She would keep him to herself, for the time at least—him and his secret. There was mutual attraction, strong and unquestionable. Elective affinities. And such things had their rights.

Wilful and independent—it seemed so then—she laid herself out to be with him. Mrs Image was indolent, physically. In the morning the military politician was wont to wait in the antechamber of a man of science who was great on the healing waters; later in the day he was borne from the Bath House, closely muffled, in a curtained chair, and put to bed till dinner-time, at the hotel. He was not seriously ill, however, and the treatment, which had begun a fortnight before Richard Pelse's arrival, would now soon be over. Anyhow their opportunities were numbered. There was an end to meetings—chance meetings, after all, though wished for on both sides—at noon, under the shade of the grouped trees, in a sun-smitten park encircled by the mountains; at night, amid the soft illuminations of the Villa des Fleurs, whither Miss Image

was chaperoned ; again, at breakfast time, when, almost from the open windows of the hotel, could be discerned, here and there, between luxuriant foliage, gold and green—beyond the richness of walnut and chestnut branch, beyond the vines, beyond the poplar marshes and the sunny fields—a level flash of turquoise, which was the Lac de Bourget.

'We go to-night,' said Beatrice, meeting Mr Pelse by the Roman Arch, when she had deposited her father for his last consultation.

'Shall I speak to Colonel Image?' he urged, almost hopelessly.

'I was mad for you to do it ; but you never must. Nothing could possibly come of it but harm. You must be loyal and obey me. There is not the very ghost of a chance for us. Oh! you won't think of me very long. You have your own life, you know ; and I must have mine. Silly, silly lovers! I might wait ; but then it could never, *never*, be. Dick!—forget me!'

She had been presented that Season. For a moment there had fallen upon her the smile of the Princess. She had been admired at the Drawing-room ; and she and what she wore had been admired afterwards, at a Drawing-room tea. She had danced at great houses, and was there as

a native of them. There was reason as well as earnestness in the tone of 'Dick!—forget me!'

'And in England we live almost in the next street,' he said to her. 'There is nothing but class that divides us. I have done something already, if you recollect how I began. I could do more, and go a good deal further. You are the first lady I ever talked to, intimately. You would change me—you would bring me up to you.'

'There is nothing in me to bring you up to, Dick. Think how young I am! I am a little fool, who happened to take a fancy to you. Pretty, am I? But a little fool, after all. You treated me so gravely and so well. I had been flattered often enough. And I was mad to be respected. . . . There is no chivalry left. . . . Your respect was flattery, too. . . . . Here is my photograph, because I trust you. But forget me, forget me! My last word. Take my hand, and good-bye!'

He took her hands—both of them—and saw the last of her. And, by another train, he, too, went back to London—to the chemist's shop.

It was curious, at first, to think, as he was making up prescriptions, or giving them to his

assistants, that she was within a stone's throw of that pestle and mortar: almost within sight of the green and red and straw-coloured jars that stood in his shop-window and were the sign of his calling. His shop was in Orchard Street; their house, in Manchester Square. Once, did she pass the shop? Once, when he was on the Oxford Street pavement, was that she, borne along in a Victoria?

But gradually he was training himself to forget all that. He was loyal, obedient—was accepting the inevitable. Was it not a chance fancy! Was it not in sheer impulsiveness—in recognition of he wondered what in him, besides his deepest admiration—that she had flung him her confidence; honoured him by liking. Could that last with her? Could it anyhow have lasted? Probably he would never see her again. Might he not one day console himself?—he once half-whispered. No—it could never be that. He was so dainty about women; he was so particular—he either wanted nothing, or exacted so much—the experience of a rapid fascination would never be repeated. He was an idealist—of those who want, in women, a picture and a vision: not a housekeeper.

III

The autumn dragged along. Pelse had acquired from America the rights to an exclusive sale of a particular preparation of the Hypophosphites, and the Society doctors—the men who had charge of Royalty, and of overtasked celebrities, of smart people, and of the very rich —had taken to recommend it. The extra work which that involved made him very busy, and his own more accustomed work, in all its thousand details, was done at his shop with such a singular nicety—of which he, of course, was the inspirer — that the shop was more and more frequented.

Winter succeeded to autumn. A thick fog had lain for days over Orchard Street. Then there came a little snow. But in the parlour over the shop—with the three windows closely curtained — one could have forgetfulness of weather. There was the neat fire-place ; the little low tea-table; a bookcase in which Pelse—before that critical event at Aix-les-Bains—had been putting, gradually, first editions of the English Poets ; a cabinet of china, in which—but always before Aix-les-Bains—he had taken

to accumulate some pretty English things of whitest paste or finest painting: a Worcester cup, with its exotic birds, its lasting gold, its scale-blue ground, like lapis lazuli or sapphire; a Chelsea figure; something from Swansea; white plates of Nantgarw, bestrewn with Billingsley's greyish pink roses, of which he knew the beauty, the free artistic touch. How the things had lost interest for him! 'From the moment,' says some French art critic, 'that a woman occupies me, my collection does not exist.' And many a woman may lay claim to occupy a French art critic; only one had occupied Richard Pelse.

It was on an evening in December, and Pelse was in the sitting-room, tired with the day's labours, and not particularly happy with the evening newspapers—for, apart from any causes of private discontent, the *Pall Mall* had told him that our upper classes were unworthy of confidence, and from the *St James's* he had gathered that even the lower could scarcely boast complete enlightenment—it was on an evening in December, when the chemist was so circumstanced, that his neat servant, opening the door of the parlour, held it back for the entrance of a veiled, tall lady. 'Miss Image,'

said the servant, for the name had been frankly given her.

The servant vanished. Richard Pelse rose from his seat, with his heart beating. The tall lady was standing there, with lifted arms, detaching veil and the broad velvet hat. A minute afterwards, laying aside her furs and her warm wraps, the glowing face of a swift walker in the winter weather was made visible: the blonde head, the slim and straight and rounded figure had got up to the fire-place. She put her hand out towards Richard Pelse. He took it; exclaimed to her, by her name: nothing more—'Beatrice!'—wheeled a chair to the fire. And down she sat.

'Yes. I could stand it no longer. I have passed the place so often. I was mad to see you. They are gone into the country on a visit. I could manage it to-night.' She looked quite good and sweet and serious—passionate it might be, as well as young, but, at all events, no intriguing Miss. Strange!—the intuitive trust she had in him, to come there, so. 'Perhaps you can give me some tea!'

He flew downstairs to order it—a bell's summons would have been inadequate to the occasion, and would have given no vent to his

delight. Ten minutes later, it was in front of the fire. The lamp was just behind her. Might he be calm now? Might he be excited? Might he be paralysed with astonishment? She was so quiet and so bright, he was made quiet too. She sat there as in an old and daily place —the blonde head, the eyes, the figure's lines. He was so happy. Suddenly his house was made a home.

'How have you been? How are you?' But before he answered he had given her a stool, respectfully: had put a cushion at her head. 'How good of you!' she said, with her grey eyes very beautiful: thanking him for his mental attitude: not for his cushion and his stool.

'Well, you know, I have been trying to forget you. Have you changed your mind?' he asked. She gazed into the fire. 'Has the time come for me to speak?' he continued. His chair was beside hers. 'Why did you come here?'

'I suppose I felt you cared about me. And I was sick of *not* coming. I suppose I felt you were a friend. No, I don't think I have changed my mind at all. But I am one of the girls who can do mad things. And girls who can do mad things, once or twice in their lives at all events, are commoner—much commoner—than proper

people think. So here I am! 'Tisn't wonderful. Father and mother are at Lord Sevenoaks'.'

His brow clouded. Again, and, as it seemed, with emphasis, the difficulty of class. Difficult? Impossible, was it not? Yet this was what he said:—

'You will come again? And one day I will speak. Beatrice, Beatrice,—I am *yours*! Have it as you will—it shall all be as you will—but you *know* that you can never go away for good.'

'If you are nice to me, very likely I shall come back ever so *many* times. I can't stay very long to-night. There—my cup. Ah! you have got a piano? Whose is it?'—opening it. 'A Bechstein. Sit still there. I will play.'

She tried the instrument a moment, first. Certain chords. Then, with turned head, she waited silently: was making her choice. For, whatever it was, it would have to be from memory. There was not a single music book.

In a minute, she had chosen. It was a plunge into a weird, wild dance. 'You know whose that is?'

'No.'

'Polish. Xaver Scharwenka's. Now the same again, and then another.' And they were played,

and then she rose from the piano. 'My cloak, please. Thank you.'

He went to the window-curtain: listened for the rumble of the street, for all the city was about them—they two. But the noises of the town had ceased.

'Snowing fast!' he said, coming back from the red curtain. 'Can you go?'

'It is only two minutes' walk,' she answered. 'And I don't quite think I see them cheeking me. Besides, I will find some excuse or other for wet things. O! you think me mean. You don't approve of prevarications. But prevarications give me to you.' Her smile would have moved mountains. 'Thank you'—near the door. 'I suppose I shall come back many times. Dick! I feel like it.' He looked enraptured. She put her hand out, and he took it. Always respectful, reverential, he had had an angel's visit. From the Heavens, down into Orchard Street, what divine, undreamt of, guest! 'O! but you worship me *too much*,' she said. She brushed his cheek with her lips, and her hand stayed in his.

'You must come back many times,' he said, half gasping. All his manhood yearned for her.

And she was gone—and gone as much as the last note of Scharwenka's wild music.

For she never came back. The voice, the figure's lines, the blonde head, and the eyes, and the mouth that was Cupid's bow—no more in Richard Pelse's sitting-room. A flirt, was she? Heartless?—changeable?—a child? Who shall say? For weeks, he waited. Then a short letter:—

'O! Dick; It is of no use, you know. You'll have to forgive me, because I was wrong and rash. Only, Dick, understand that it is all over. I could never do that again. If I say I owe Father and Mother something, you know I'm not a fraud—you know I mean it. After all, we should never have done together. Yet, I love you. Think of me kindly. Good-bye!'

And she kept her word. And it was over. No lamplight welcomed her; nor fire gleamed for her; nor chairs were placed again on the cosy hearth for two. And, in the closed piano, there slept, for ever, Scharwenka's wild music.

IV

But Pelse had to move from Orchard Street. Change of scene; change of people. And good-bye—with all his heart—to the fashionable custom—to the inroads of the elegant who

reminded him of Her, though with a difference. He must seek a new life, in some work-a-day quarter. To be with the busy and the common —not with any chosen or privileged humanity; but just humanity: nothing else. To be with people who really suffered; not with people who wanted hair-dyes. So it was that when a long-established druggist of Islington passed away old and decrepit, with a business neglected and lessened, Richard Pelse came near the 'Angel' —to the dingy shop you mounted into by two steep steps from the pavement—to the dingy shop with the small-paned old-fashioned windows; with the little mahogany desk at which who stood at it commanded the prospect of the City Road. He sold the Orchard Street business; and, taking with him only the youngest and least qualified of his young men—and the china and the First Editions, to coax his thoughts to return again to these first loves—he established himself afresh, and did his own work. Gradually he was recognised as rather an exceptional person in the quarter. And his energy was great enough to allow him, little by little, year by year, to build up a trade.

Things were slack in the forenoons, and a face sometimes depressed, sometimes pre-occu-

pied, looked out into the street; and Pelse would stand at his desk with bright eyes and clenched mouth, rapping a tune nervously with long lean fingers. After Islington's early dinner, important people were abroad—the people who lived in the squares on the west side of Upper Street—and the wife of a City house-agent, pompous and portly, patronised (with the breadth of the counter, and all that that conveyed, between them) a man whom Beatrice Image had once kissed. Acquaintance with these folk was strictly limited. The shop-keeper, refined and super-sensitive, was not good enough company for the genteel.

But when evening came, he was wont to be too busy to think for an instant of his social place. The prescriptions brought to him were few, but the shop—and on Saturday night especially—was crowded with the smaller *bourgeoisie*, with their little wants; the maid of all work from the Liverpool Road arrived hurriedly in her cap, and was comforted; Mr Pelse was the recipient of sorry confidences from the German clerks of Barnsbury. He was helpful and generous—kind to the individual and a cynic to the race. Late in the evening the gas flared in the little shop. Its shutters were just

closed when the cheap play-house, almost within sight, vomited forth its crowd, and loafers were many about the bars of the 'Angel' and at the great street-corner, and omnibus and tramcar followed each other still upon the long main roads. The night of the second-rate suburb.

That life went on for years; and Pelse was a bachelor with no relations; getting visibly older and thinner; and a shock of white hair crowned now the pale forehead, over the dark brilliance of the keen, quick eyes. Long ago he had read in the newspaper of the marriage of Miss Image —a day when he had been wondering where, of all places in the wide world, the one face might be?

> 'Where is she now? What lands or skies
> Paint pictures in her friendly eyes?'

Then he had read of her marriage. Hers, at least, was a wound that had healed! His?—but what sign was there of wound at all? For in intervals of business he had come again to hug his First Editions. They knew him at book sales, at Sotheby's. He dusted his own Worcester carefully. Was it not of the best period? —with the 'square mark.' As a contrast to his quarter's commonness, he had begun to cultivate the exquisite with the simple in his daily ways.

His food was sometimes frugal, but it was cooked to perfection. When he allowed himself a luxury, for himself and one rare crony—an unknown artist of the neighbourhood, discovered tardily; a professor of languages, who understood literature; or a brother druggist, whom business dealings caused him to know—it was nothing short of the best that he allowed himself: he admitted not the second-rate: he was an idealist still. The fruit with which, just once or twice in summer or in autumn, he regaled a pretty child, was not an apple or an orange, but grey-bloomed grapes, or a peach, quite flawless. The glass of wine which he brought out from the parlour cupboard to the weak old woman, accommodated with a chair, was a soft Madeira, or a sherry nearly as old as she was. It had known long voyages. It was East India, or it was Bristol Milk. Yes; he was fairly prosperous; and showed no sign of wound.

Even 'the collector' within him reasserted itself in novel enterprise. To the Worcester, the Swansea, the Nantgarw, the Chelsea, the First Editions, there came to be added bits, that were faultless, of Battersea Enamel—casket and candlesticks, saltcellars, needle-case, and rose-

pink patchbox: best of all, the dainty *étui*, with the rare puce ground, or the white thing with the tulip and the pansy—pansies for thoughts—and, winding in between its gilded scrolls, the foreign motto, '*Fidèle en amitié*'—a Frenchman's utmost vow. Yes; he was prosperous.

Nor was it Battersea only. Hidden away in the recesses of a cupboard—Pelse questioning a little, within himself, the rightness of its barbaric splendour—there may have lain one specimen of Vernis-Martin, a glow of gold and of red. He was a collector, and fortunate.

Still, the nerves had been strained for many a year; and suddenly were shattered. Speechless and one side stiffened—stricken now with paralysis—Mr Pelse lay in the bedroom over the shop; understanding much, but making small sign to servant or assistant or medical man. His last view—before a second and a final seizure—was of the steady February rain; the weary London afternoon; the unbroken sky; the slate roofs, wet and glistening; the attic windows of the City Road. He had lived—it seemed to him—so long. The Past—that moment of the Past, however vivid—might, one thinks, be quite forgotten.

Yet, wrapped in a soiled paper, in the pocket

of his frock-coat, after death, they found a girl's likeness. 'My photograph, because I trust you!' she had said to him at Aix-les-Bains. And what was all the rest!

In all his thought, for all those years, she was his great, dear friend. Once or twice he had held her beautiful hands—looked at her eyes—been strong and happy in the magnetism of her presence.

Penarth, February, 1888—*Buxton, August*, 1890.

A CONFIDENCE AT THE SAVILE

A CONFIDENCE AT THE SAVILE

'YES, you must have the story with a certain amount of detail, or you would only blame me in a case in which, after all, in my heart of hearts, I think there may be something to be said in my excuse.'

Kenyon, the minor poet—whose verse is much 'inquired for' at Paternoster House and at the Bodley Head—was the speaker. Binns, the political leader-writer—who had left the War Office, for more remunerative work on a great daily paper—was preparing to listen. And the place was the quietest corner in the house of the Savile Club—a spot to which the cigarette of the stranger is not encouraged to penetrate. It was thus that Kenyon continued :—

'I met her last Easter, at a villa near Tours. I had been staying at the Hôtel de l'Univers ; but it was between the seasons ; the winter

visitors had left very early; the summer ones had not come; and so, in a hotel generally frequented by the English, there was not a soul to speak to. For four nights in succession I dined alone in the deserted *salle-à-manger*—which ended in my being more bored than entertained by the superfluous attentions of the three waiters. Not one of them young, and all of them solemn, and their respectful devotion concentrated upon me. One of them looked what he actually was—a waiter, simply, but a waiter who had prospered. The second was meditative, *recueilli*, sedately deferential—like Regnier, you remember, as the most firmly-fixed of confidential servants, in *La Joie fait Peur*. The third was like a priest who is man of the world also: ecclesiastic first, but diplomatist and *bon vivant* besides. Very different were the three; yet, study them as I would, I could distinguish no inequality in their rank or place. No one of them seemed greater than the others, or was before the others. Saint Athanasius himself—not to say it irreverently—would have been puzzled to define their position. I felt the impressiveness of them all, and I left the hotel.

'But come now, Binns!' he resumed earnestly. 'We must not indulge ourselves in even my

very thinnest vein of comedy. We must get to some one I want to talk about—we must get to the situation. When I decided to leave, I bethought me of some well-bred French people who, in a private fashion, put up two or three boarders. A Madame Tessier and her husband, a retired functionary. Having an introduction from people who had stayed with them, I went over the Loire, to Saint Symphorien, to call. I see myself crossing the great stone bridge, of fourteen arches. I remember the late March sunlight on the shining river; the steady mount up the hill-side beyond it; white villas rising above the cottages on the quay; tall walls enclosing gardens, or, it may be, vineyards; and, above the high sky-line, the calm blue—yes, the calm blue, even in that early spring. The name of the house was 'Le Paradis.' It was a château-like villa, built in the first days of the Restoration; with a long, large garden shut in on three sides by the grey, stone walls, but open on the fourth, or, rather, ended on that side—the side towards the river and Tours—by an alley of lime trees, which formed a brown-screened walk in winter, a green-screened walk in summer. From the lime-tree alley, you dominated all the country—great river, and towered town, and

absolutely endless plain. . . . You know I am a deep believer in backgrounds and surroundings, "environment," *milieu*. Do me the honour, then, to take the trouble to realise the landscape as I describe it; for it was there, with such a background, that I saw Miss Pennell for the first time, and there that I saw her for the last. A country opulent, yet scarcely luxurious: exquisite, and not overwhelming.

'Ringing the bell at the little green door in the long garden wall, I found it answered by an antique gardener; and, after braving the fury of three savage mastiffs—all of them, as I afterwards discovered, Margaret Pennell's intimate friends—one went up the white steps, one was shown into a pretty salon, furnished with oak and hung with tapestry—for the Tessiers had seen better days. With Madame Tessier—thanks in part to my capital introduction—I was soon on excellent terms. She was eight and fifty perhaps; and silvery grey, with an air "Marie-Antoinette." She had reached the picturesqueness of age, and not its incapacity. Though my stay was bound, in any case, to be short, she made no difficulty about taking me. I was to come at once, and was to go when I must. So, later in the afternoon, I sent my

baggage up from the hotel, and for the rest of my stay in Touraine I was installed in Le Paradis. I had managed, I remember, to establish a truce with the three brutes who kept its gates. My attitude towards a dog is always that of an armed and watchful peace. Actual amity is a condition I never hope for; but, from a dog—as well as from Russia—one may demand the maintenance of the *status quo*.

'At dinner, which was quite a family meal; good, yet of the utmost simplicity—from the soup to the *petit vin* of the country: a Chinon, was it, or a Joué?—at dinner, my dear Binns—believe me, I entreat you, I do not tell you a single detail that is not of importance—there were Monsieur and Madame Tessier; and their niece, a brown French girl; and their nephew, a young notary; and an invalid Englishwoman of middle age; and myself; and a vacant chair.

'A vacant chair only for the first few minutes. It belonged, as I gathered almost directly, to the niece of the invalided Englishwoman: to Miss Margaret Pennell, who had been wintering with her aunt at Le Paradis, and was going out to India later in the spring, to join her people for the first time since her childhood. Was she too an invalid? Yes, or No? I had but time to

ask myself the question when she appeared in the flesh, to answer it.

'She was the only blonde you ever saw who had a brunette's vigour.* She was tall and fine; the mouth big; the cheeks warm coloured; the hair crisp gold. She was dressed in black. I may as well tell you at once what I discovered gradually during the next day or two—I cannot prove it to you, nor is she here to help me—that she had the intelligence of cultivated people, and of people who think for themselves; that she had the enthusiasm of an artist—I don't mean of a painter—and the fearlessness and the distinction of the English upper class. And, along with these virtues of very different sets, she had a dignity which is of Woman herself. . . . We shall neither of us see her again, Binns. No, my dear fellow, you will not be so fortunate, I promise you! You will never see her. Long before now, some great vessel of the

* Are we to conclude that Mr Kenyon unconsciously reveals to us that hitherto his imagination had been fired by brunettes alone? Or are we justified in surmising that there may have been hours when plenitude of grace had made atonement for deficiency in 'vigour'? '*Doublement femme puisqu'elle était blonde*,' says Edmond About. Alas! on this important matter, History appears silent. There would seem to be no authentic record of Mr Kenyon's earlier dealings with the fair.

P. and O. has swung her across the seas. The *Rome* perhaps, or perhaps the *Chusan*. And this August she must be at a hill-station. I think it was to be *the* hill-station. Simla. Yes, Simla. But I must tell you the story.

'After my silent meals with the three waiters, my first dinner at Le Paradis was a pleasant opportunity. Speech, I assure you, was golden! And the flood-gates were opened. Margaret Pennell came down next morning, to take her coffee and roll in the dining-room. I was taking mine there too. Another pleasant opportunity, Binns—and enjoyed even at an hour when, as your experience of country-house visits must have convinced you, it is curiously hard to be entertaining. Some of us find it sufficiently difficult to be agreeable at any hour. But, to be agreeable at breakfast-time! . . . Well, it was another pleasant opportunity; and *salon*, *salle-à-manger*, garden, alley of lime-trees brown with winter — for it was but March, remember—they were witnesses of several more. No end of talk, over a range of matters! I was not such a fool, of course, as to imagine that because as regards society I had been for a few days past on starvation diet, I was straightway to fall in love with the first attractive person I

came across—I, a man of four and thirty at that moment; who had published his poems; who had lived his poems; who had seen cities and men. No, nothing of the kind! Still, though the circumstances in themselves didn't for a minute justify my falling in love, you know, I am not sure that the young woman did not. She was peculiar in her intelligence, in her beauty of strength, in her comprehensiveness and tolerance. Along with these, she had that gift of reverence which is not, as far as I have noticed, the especial characteristic of our day. You would have approved of her thoroughly. She suited me down to the ground.

'She had seen very little of Society—had come almost lately from a first-rate school at Clifton. But her people were army people and an old county family. Generations of courage and of pretty manners—and of willingness to be pleased—had given something to her blood. I can't, of course, show you how it was, or bring it up before you for you to see; but I believe, anyhow, that she was born brave and wise and gracious. In any case, we got on swimmingly, and it didn't take me long to persuade myself that at last, after so many hours misconceived, my hour had come.

'Her aunt—Lady Jane Bayliss—rather took to me because I was a poet: I mean because I had a name that was a little known. Binns—if you will allow me, in a parenthesis, to say so—what an advantage, among people of a certain sort, I have found that to be! To be recognised at last as the producer of some not very faulty Sonnets—to be spoken of as after all no mean authority upon the *ballade* and the *villanelle*. Perhaps one has earned it. But I am not sure, to this day, whether Lady Jane ever once thought that I was smitten seriously with Margaret, or whether she would have looked upon me with any sort of favour if I had shown that I was. Anyhow, instead of raising barriers, she gave us facilities for getting together—was content if I talked to her a little in the morning in the garden, and made a fourth with her at whist, at night. Lady Jane played a good hand, I recollect; whilst I—but my thoughts were otherwhere. The rest of the time, or for much of it at least, she encouraged me in my talks with Margaret; possibly considering me instructive, and, it may be, less revolutionary than, say, an average "Extension" lecturer—almost always, as I understand, a somewhat "advanced" person. And, Binns—as your expression at this moment

politely conveys to me—no doubt I *was* harmless. *I* had lectured to nobody. Nowhere. Not even at Toynbee Hall; where Social and literary questions are settled out of hand: no, not even in Whitechapel—that district in vogue, where gifted charwomen and penetrating tailoresses make plain to educated people Mr Watts's allegories, and affable mechanics rarely scorn the society of apologetic gentlepeople. . . . But I beg your pardon!

'Lady Jane let us trudge off—we two—one afternoon, I recollect, to Plessis-les-Tours, to see what's left of Louis Onze's castle; another day, into the streets over the bridge, to discover the house in which Balzac was born. Margaret Pennell had managed to read, already, not only *Eugénie Grandet*. Some one must have advised her, who knew. She had sensible things of her own to say about *L'Interdiction* and *La Messe de l'Athée*. Though she was as healthy a young woman as was ever beheld—danced, rode, and loved the country—she had a true sympathy with the making of books; and, as for myself, you know very well, that, careful though I may be about Form, my real respect, in my best hours, is given to work that is substantial and masculine. Could it be denied to Balzac?

'Then we used to wait upon the quay, near the great bridge, watching the men in the flat-bottomed boats—the *bachots* in mid-stream—getting up sand from the river's bed; or watching, perhaps, the play of the grey, uncertain, afternoon light upon the river itself, and the buildings of the outstretched town. For, in Touraine, March, though it is not cold, has yet its changes of weather. And now the light revealed, and now displayed, the forms of the cathedral—the towers of Saint Gatien, the fine outline of its northern transept. Now the square and flat-topped Tower of Charlemagne, as they call it, and the dome close by—both further to the right than the cathedral, in the panorama of the town — would stand dark iron-coloured, against a silvery, luminous horizon. A drawing by Fulleylove, say! And then a storm-cloud threw its great shadow over a reach of the river. And now the poplars on the island in the Loire bent with the west wind, and the shallow waters hissed under the attack of a swift sudden rain-shower—as you have seen them on the lagoon, at Venice. We watched these things together, and, in the garden, when we had regained it, watched from the terrace—from that brown alley of lime-trees—the great changeful sky. Pleasant

times, they were! "Love in idleness," was it? But was it Love at all? Was it only the recognition of her healthy charm?—I, who at home had been, at bottom, rather tired, you know, of women with puffed sleeves and theories!

'When we like people, thoroughly, something that is more subtle than any word, more definite than any thought—something that is of the very essence of our nature—goes out from us to tell them so. From me, I'm sure, something went out, telling Miss Pennell that I liked her. And I don't think I'm wrong in saying that from her too came out, to me, something by which I felt that in a certain way, up to a certain point, I was liked too.

'Yet we never got any further. No, my dear fellow, I assure you—not a step further! It came about in this way. Of course I spotted her good qualities, quickly enough—felt how straight she was, and how capable. Still, you know, among Englishwomen, after all, many are like that. What I liked best in her face was the soul in it; the vitality, vivacity, the immediate response. That, in the peculiar form of it, was what, in my imagination, separated her from all the others. And that once gone—the

gulf between her and the rest of them—the whole long train of them—existing no longer—how idealise, how adore her, to the end of one's days? . . . But I'm anticipating.

'This, Binns, was how it happened. I make a clean breast of it. Once, in the *salon* of Le Paradis, I caught Miss Pennell sleeping. It was at noon—just before mid-day breakfast. We had been having a long walk together, on the uplands behind the house. Walking along, she had confessed to me that at an early hour, in her bedroom, she had been much engrossed with a new thing, which nobody in Tours could teach her. Step dancing. A whim of hers, not to be behind-hand even in that! So she had practised diligently her *coupées* and her *battements*—which were to give her the lightness that she scarcely wanted—and she was all the merrier for the circumstance. I had never found her more exhilarating—never more responsive. It was April, but a day of March wind—we had trudged for miles in the wild spring weather. Coming back to the house, going into the *salon*—it had no other occupant—she had taken up a sailor-story of Pierre Loti's, lying on the table, and was fingering its pages when I went upstairs. When I came down, ten minutes afterwards—

having added a good sentence to my somewhat insignificant "Note" on the "Essential Identity of the Ballade and the Chant Royal"—Loti's *Mon Frère Yves* was fingered no longer. The book lay in her lap—had insufficient foothold—would tumble presently on the floor. Margaret's hands—large, healthy, full-veined and true flesh-coloured—hung by her side. I'm an observer of hands, and hers were the right sort. But her face? The soul had gone out of it! Not only was her sleep "a most fast sleep," in the phrase of Lady Macbeth's Gentlewoman—there was the half-opened mouth, with the closed eyes. If I said that her jaw visibly fell, I should be wronging her. It did not do that. But the soul was gone. What I seemed to see, was dead matter. Margaret slept the sleep of the just, but the sleep of the unattractive.

'I remember, as if it had been yesterday, the silence of the room; the spacious place, empty of life; the face, with the thought vanished. Presently, *Mon Frère Yves* dropped to the ground—to the carpet, almost noiselessly. I laid it upon the table, with some sadness. I went out into the garden.

'When we met at the meal, afterwards, she was not what I had known her. I was talking to her

with a want of interest. Dull, make-shift conversation: nothing to bring the soul back. No, it was all over. If I looked forward, as perhaps I did, I trust it was not indelicate. I ask excuses for my apprehension. It was, I daresay, exaggerated. You, Binns, may have enjoyed more frequent opportunities of studying the aspect of a woman in slumber. Next day, I received an important, even an urgent, summons; and I left Tours, after all, only ever so little earlier than I had at first intended.

'But how often have I asked myself, since then, —"Ought I to have stomached it?" Did I miss my chance, Binns? A question forced upon me, not here only at the Savile—not chiefly here, indeed, in a world of well-informed and not undistinguished men—but in times of quietude, in times of reflection; in country holidays, sometimes a little aimless; at accidental moments, when, in a newspaper, one's eye catches "Indian Intelligence"—Bombay, Simla, the Presidency, the Governor-General, the value of the rupee—or gets reminders of the passage of the P. and O. boats: the *Rome*, the *Chusan*—as I told you before. . . . Well,—am I to blame?'

Binns considered for a moment; smiled; then delivered himself:—

'The case has not been tried before a competent tribunal. Kenyon, my dear fellow, I am such an ordinary person! It humiliates me to recognise that that is so. I feel it deeply, I assure you. Had I behaved as you did, I should probably blame myself for having been so attentive to the young woman for a fortnight: so indifferent—not to say neglectful of her—afterwards. For myself, I'm a believer in robust loves, rather than in sentiment combed out fragile and thin.'

Kenyon protested. Binns went on without a pause.

'For myself, it is just possible that I would rather actually *live*—help the land, where I may; clink glasses with my friend; and kiss the girl I love—than even be the author of your quite admirable "Note" on the "Essential Identity of the Ballade and the Chant Royal." But not for a moment would I sit in judgment upon you and your conduct. I know I'm not equal to it. Cotton don't print my verses in the *Academy*, nor MacColl in the *Athenæum*. The presiding genius of Paternoster House would hardly look at my manuscripts—if I had occasion to send them to him. The limited edition, and the fifty copies on "large paper," you know—I shall

never attain to that. My writing is for the public. . . . My dear man!—in the particular matter you've consulted me about, you were just yourself. Do I dream of blaming you? Of course not! Had I your mastery of the sonnet-form, the workings of my mind, in love affairs, would no doubt be as subtle as yours.'

Tours, March, 1889—Kirby Moorside, September, 1892.

THE NORTH COAST AND ELEANOR

THE NORTH COAST AND ELEANOR

I

'SHOCKING Tragedy at Whitby; Death of an Artist and Actress!' The words were printed in big capitals on the posters of the Whitby newspapers—they could be read across the street by every passer by—scarcely a month after the same newspapers had contained, in a column of 'Local Intelligence':—'To the list of visitors of note now sojourning amongst us, there have been added, during the present week, the Very Rev. the Dean of Durham; Mr George Norton, A.R.A., the well-known portrait painter; and Miss Eleanor Lang, the rising actress.' And the passer-by, the idle or the curious, who, attracted by the sturdy capitals—'SHOCKING TRAGEDY—ARTIST AND ACTRESS'—went into the news-shop and proffered the penny for the Whitby print, read, when he opened the paper, a long para-

graph, in which an intelligent reporter had set down, with conscientious diffuseness, the little he had discovered. It does not matter much what was the paragraph; instead of the paragraph, there will be written here—what the intelligent reporter did not know.

II

George Norton, 'the well-known portrait painter,' and Eleanor Lang, 'the rising actress,' were friends who might have been lovers. But he had been married eight years since, and was still married; and she was good, and her life modest, and her name beyond reproach. 'Lovers' —impossible then!

Yet there would have been something to plead in extenuation. Mrs Norton had been for seven years one of the most deceptive, because at her best moments one of the most fascinating, inmates of the house in which Dr Parker Brown prolonged the days of the dipsomaniac. For seven years, although a certain beauty remained to her, impressing the stranger, she had given to her husband not a shred of the comfort, not a fragment of the pleasure, she had promised in her youth; so that the broken vows —if broken they came to be—could never be his

only. His life—his life of the spirit—had been lived alone.

George Norton and Eleanor Lang—friends from the first hour they saw each other—had arrived at Whitby on the same day; for he had informed himself at the end of the season in London, of where her holiday was to be spent. And he stayed at the inn in Flowergate—facing the moors, with its back to the sea—while she was in lodgings with her mother, who believed in her completely, and certainly with justice, and without cavil acquiesced in an uncustomary freedom in coming and going—a freedom which, if it had not come of trust, might yet, indeed, have come of the circumstances of Miss Lang's profession. For, sooner or later, the upper hand belongs in many things to the winner of bread; it belongs, even when they do not claim it, to the helpful and strong. Eleanor Lang had supported the household for the last three or four years—humbly at first, very humbly; then better; now quite well. Actress—and fortunate actress, too—instead of governess or High-School teacher, or distinguished shop-girl at Jay's. A clergyman's daughter, she had always aimed to be helpful: she had learnt to be strong.

Norton and Eleanor Lang, with their friend-

ship facilitated by a certain mental kinship—a *camaraderie* of the intelligence and some likeness of temperament—were much together at Whitby. They talked for hours of her art and of his; talked of the theatre, its emotions and technicalities; talked of some painter's canvas, its colours and lines: of Whistler and Henner and Carolus Duran—Bonnat, Gervex, Degas. How soon, it seemed, they would have bored other people!—they with their dreams of an Idealism a little more imaginative than that which is content with a docile imitation of the Primitives, and of a Realism a little more significant than that which consists in the faithful transcript of the obvious. Then they had come down suddenly from sense to nonsense, and with nonsense too they were happy.

They rowed up the river together; took the boat over the weir at Ruswarp; rowed again along the sunny water, under the woods to Sleights. One day they were on Danby Moor, and there was a morning at Aislaby. In a fit of Bohemianism, confessedly mild, they stayed, one afternoon, to have their tea—quite like the stray excursionists from Leeds and Newcastle—at the cottage by the mill. They enjoyed the golden weather—on the coast, on the cliff. Bound so

much to the city, to studio and to stage, they revelled in the sunshine, in the wind, with the forces of Nature ; and they got to find, whether they meant it or no, that they were revelling in each other.

That was possible to Eleanor—all that freedom, all that association. Her ways were unconstrained, and she was at once both simple and audacious, though she belonged to a profession which much oftener makes women either wholly reckless or slavishly Philistine—afraid of nothing under Heaven, or afraid of the parish curate.

Soon, however, the happy days must be over and done with. Norton was going away to his work again—to a dozen commissions from Lady This and That and the rich Mr So-and-So ; to commissions from the women whose beauty his art was to make fashionable, and from the Crœsus of Colonists, his pictures were to distinguish. Back he was going, to a life which, whatever Society thought of his success, was solitary without quietude and active without satisfaction. Again must his painting display some cheeky gaiety that had nothing of his heart in it—some sham enthusiasm for the artificial, which should please the Town, grown tired of Nature.

And she? She was starting on a four months' provincial tour—to take her good looks and her spirit and her fairly accomplished craft to a round of country theatres from Bath to Edinburgh. She enjoyed so many things: her career, her friendships, admiration: all her daily doings. The excitement of her art might hide from her, in that which was still her youth, the need, some day, to her full being, of another excitement—love! Did it? That was the question.

III

One evening, when their stay at Whitby was close upon its end—and he thought deeply, and it may be moodily, of their now speedy separation—Norton and Eleanor walked out together on to Whitby Scaur. Whitby Scaur is an extended tract of gaunt flat rock that lies under the steepest cliffs of all that coast, and is approached, at low tide only, from the further pier, beyond the remotest houses. It was low tide now, and two or three hours from dusk, and Norton and Eleanor passed easily from the pier steps to the flat rock-beach, and walked, slowly picking their way, along the slight hollows of the rock, filled still with the morning's water;

and so on and on, with the precipitous cliff close on their right, and on their left the distant line of encroaching or receding sea. The great cliff, flaky and fossiliferous—the joy of the geologist—rose slaty-black four hundred feet to the upper greensward, crowned by the Abbey ruins. At a lesser height, but left a long way now behind them, was the quaint old parish church, amidst its company of upright gravestones, crowding to the cliff's edge. Half of the stones there, in the graveyard, marked no actual grave; stood but in memory of shipwrecked sailors, lost some of them in southern, and some of them in western seas.

Norton thought of this and of a picture he had seen at the Academy, of that churchyard in its mystery of dusk. '*Unto this—last*,' he said to his companion, passing under the place below the cliff. 'All of us, Eleanor, in one sense or another, if not to Whitby churchyard, in the grey of evening. *Unto this—last.* The gift of Death!'

She said, What was it had dejected him so awfully? The day, the solitary place?

'No; it is the going away from you. But I shall get the better of it. I shall be cheerful enough this evening with your mother, you will find.'

Well, that was right, she answered. And wasn't it better to be cheerful now?

They were made to be together, and when they were together—as long as they forgot that they must separate—they were quite happy. To-day Norton could not forget that they must separate. Must they separate? he asked himself. He had never asked her that. And it was better to be silent at that moment—silent, though she was beside him—than to disturb a mind still generally untroubled: young and fresh with her two-and-twenty years. Leave her alone with her warm and honest heart; leave her alone with her brown and healthy beauty! No use to perplex her soul with murky problems!

He had tried solutions for himself—was trying them even now—but they had failed always, and would fail again. The world was too strong for them; for these two only; for Eleanor and him. They could never live together. No; they must separate. Hardly even could they hope that that one time, which they had found delightful, could recur. Scarcely again, on greyest days, would she give warmth and colour to the northern landscape, and be the best of foreground figures, over whose arm, beside whose

head, to see the long lines of its moors and skies. He must take some thought for her good name.

'This is a weird place,' he said to her, after a while. 'It *is* that, perhaps, that makes me gloomy to-night.' He said 'to-night,' for it was now beginning to be evening. 'Don't look out there,' he added. 'Perhaps we will turn back. It is too barren and pitiless a landscape—that great waste out there, that you were looking at—

"Where the dishevelled sea-weed *hates* the sea."

The sea is far enough away, however. Yet I would rather think of what we have left behind us—behind the pier and the port—those massed red roofs of Whitby.'

'The dear place we have been so happy in!' she said, with enthusiasm, her face brightening gratefully. 'We shall look back, shan't we? And we shall look forward.'

'Those massed red roofs, you know,' he was continuing; 'those massed roofs, flushing sometimes to rose colour, fading to purplish greys; they will be greyer still with the coming night.' He stopped a minute. 'But people have been drowned hereabouts, you know, Eleanor. When the sea once rises here, it is up much higher

further back. And that place is impassable. How would it be, I wonder, if two lovers—two quite *hopeless* lovers—found themselves here, and the sea gone up, to their surprise. What would they feel like? Would they try to get away? Would they struggle, Eleanor? How would they spend the last of their little time?'

Her eyes dilated; her lips opened with wonder or with horror. An actress's immediate realisation—was it?—of emotions not her own. But she answered quietly, after a thoughtful pause: 'It would be a wonderful time, anyhow. Perhaps they might pack a good deal of happiness into their ten minutes.' Then, in a low voice, with an intensity hardly betrayed before, 'Oh, I think they would be *awfully* happy!'

A silence, and then Norton:—

'What would they do? Would they lie down together? Would they stand up to be drowned? No, no! The sea would carry them off their feet quickly enough, when once it came; and when it reaches these rocks, even if it has been quiet before, it's quiet no longer. It beats itself back from them: it sways and shatters itself. But if it were only in the daylight, they might be seen from the water or

heard upon the land. At the cottage, high over our heads here, some way farther than the Abbey—on the very edge of the cliff, you know —there is an apparatus: a ladder of rope. "Rope ladders kept here!" You remember the notice, as we passed on the cliff yesterday. Then, perhaps, the instinct of life might be strong.'

'But if the dark had fallen?' urged she.

'Then the instinct, even if it showed itself, would be useless.'

'The *man* might, perhaps, at some point or other, be able to climb out of reach. But only then if it were clear daylight,' said Eleanor.

'But the woman?' answered her lover. '*She* could never climb! Do you think he would leave her?'

She shook her head for 'No,' with quiet decision. 'Yet that would depend, after all, on who he was.'

'I said, if he loved her,' answered Norton shortly. And then he fell again to meditating. They two, why must they separate? Was he, who had had so much of Life's smart shows and superficial experiences, to go for ever with so little of its real happiness? . . . She?

Suppose she loved him just as completely, just

as absorbingly, as he loved her, and that she braved all condemnation for his sake, and came to him to be his? That had happened before with women. All the world had heard of and read of it; and it had not *quite* always ended in disaster. Just now and then it had been justified: when great souls did it, who knew what their lives wanted, and had counted the cost. What if it happened again, and *were* justified? If Eleanor came to him willingly, his conscience, at the moment of her coming, might hold itself clear. In the whole world he was for her, and she for him, by the choice of God. God, was it, or Nature? Still, it was God.

Nine out of ten among the men and women who married were less truly one than they. He felt that, and he knew it. So might she. And, were they but once safe together, for a time it would seem to them that every day in every year of all their lives must show the difference between an attained Heaven and an endless *ennui*.

Yet the Future would bring its revenge. For her, apart from the immediate reproaches, there would be the weary train of slow disparagement. What if children should be born to them? Disgrace and shame a most inevitable portion: all Society against them.

But then, in some far-off country might there be no place where their social fault would be unknown, and the world fresh again, and the start new? How would it be with her there?

Why, this is how it would be with her there: so much of her own freshness gone; her cheerfulness and spirit, which were so much of her charm, dashed and abated; her laugh quelled, and her smile saddened. Would she be the same?

No, no!—that settled the matter. She would never be happy so. It was all hopeless: she could never be for him. Never more, at least, than she was for him now—a dear friend. Ought not friendship to suffice?

Still, there would come at times the sense of a profound blank, and of a life that had been missed: the sense of a most vain longing for the unattainable things.

'Eleanor,' said he, stopping their walk suddenly, and sitting down on a low rock that rose in a scanty space of shingle, 'those of us who are most grateful to Christianity owe it much more than we imagine,—Christianity, with its profoundest lessons of pity and hope! Do you know there have been moments in my life when I've felt what they say in the Psalm—"All Thy

storms have gone over me:" moments when, if I had not believed in a great good God, Who governs His world after all—and so had not tried to look forward with some shred of patience, thirty years perhaps, to the end—I could have wished that the Almighty had *not* "fixed His canon 'gainst self-slaughter."'

That was a wild saying; yet she was ready to receive it. It only expressed strongly a fact not kept from her. In Norton's life, of late, success —professional or social—was but the surface; the depth was Eleanor.

Yet 'Hush!' she said to him, putting her hand tenderly, or soothingly at least, upon his arm—for the first time in her life; so cordially, so naturally—how much she liked, even if she did not love him! 'That is sad of you, or absurd; and you'll please not say such things again. It is only if you will be the Hamlet to my Ophelia, instead of painting my portrait for the third time—quite unnecessarily—that I can hear *that* quotation from Shakespeare. Never out of the theatre; on one side only of the float' —she tried to be playful—'no, never unless it is on the stage; never again, please!' And he was quieted and silent, and they began to walk once more.

'I am so profoundly fond of you,' he said; speaking to her for the first time quite so plainly—owing her, having the right to give her, just the truth. 'And I should always be as fond of you, Eleanor, I know, as I am to-day—this hour, and have been all this month—though I detest the Puritan notion of measuring love always by its constancy; never by its intensity. Constancy is not the only quality, as you would some day see—you who are ardent and flexible, and impressed in many ways. The limpet here is constant, and the rock-weed constant, and the sea is—*not* constant. Yet who would weigh their petty constancy against the force and beauty of the sea? No! Constancy depends upon the mere conditions and opportunities of life. Intensity depends upon the being that lives. My love would always be faithful—I know that it would—but it would like to be praised for fire, and not for faithfulness.'

'As it is, we can praise it for *nothing*,' she said, gently. But was that quite the whole of her thought? And, if not, what was her secret?

'I know that; I know it. In a sense, I feel nothing to you. I have no share in your life—

no place that is certain. Sometimes I am hardly a friend. Then again, there are times, because I was drawn to you by something much more than your beauty—only you will think me fanciful—when, if I look along my future, Eleanor, I seem to see the shadow of no parting from you.'

'Come, come, you are getting very tremendous!' she said, with what might have been a little laughter in her eyes, and not much fear in her voice. She believed in him so much. Whenever he even threatened to be getting 'tremendous' she had a way of changing the subject. 'I've been thinking lately,' she went on, 'a good deal about Portia. I'm to try to play her at Liverpool. We open there in *The Merchant*. Has it ever struck you, now, that there is any likeness—some little bit of a likeness—between Portia and Shirley? In the essentials of character: actual character, I mean. As to manner, Shirley, of course, couldn't help being brusque, continually—for that was Charlotte Brontë herself—while Portia could never have been brusque at all.'

Her analysis was superficial, trivial, perhaps at fault. It was well intended, however—a diversion, at all events.

'Charlotte Brontë's Shirley'—Norton began in answer. But a gusty autumn evening was setting steadily in. It was true daylight no longer, and the north wind blew from the sea. And the line of the horizon was not visible any more, where the grey sky met the grey water. And the one sound, often recurrent, distinctly heard and not far distant, was the fall and splashing of the wave—the long wave on the flat shore. 'You'll be getting cold, Eleanor,' he said to her, and he turned her hurriedly by the arm, though he spoke in a voice that was intended not to frighten her; 'and your mother will be wondering what has become of you, and you will be home late.'

She gave him a penetrating look as she joined his hasty step.

'But the sea is a long way off,' she said, firmly; for, in an instant, she had understood his mind.

'Not so very far,' he answered. It was better that she should know it. And they walked hurriedly round one point—scrambled round another. And the mist thickened, driven by the north wind to the shore. Suddenly it became evident that a depression of the rock-beach—an alteration of the level, unnoticed as they had

walked in just the opposite direction, an hour ago—had allowed to the in-pouring waters scope and space, and the wave broke no longer and dispersed itself upon a flattened shore, but met the sheer cliff, where all the waters surged and fell.

A breadth of beach and a bit of rising ground, which for a while would be untouched, were still before them—their barrier from the great sea. They reached the rising ground. The formation of the coast, the treachery of the shore and tide, made the passage of the sea, however close to the cliff-side, now evidently hopeless, for the waters were already deep. But Eleanor must be saved, and their one chance was to climb. Norton examined the rock. But, with the best survey that the fading day allowed, there was all along that line of still inaccessible coast—along that line of cliff with its base yet dry—no foothold for the climber. Here twenty feet, there fifty feet, and there a hundred feet, of unrelenting precipice. There was nothing to which the hand could attach itself: no spot on which a sea-bird could have paused.

'See here!' said Norton to Eleanor, placing his hand against the cliff, in gesture and token of its uselessness.

She understood. The two were left alone together—to the wind, to the evening, to the sea.

They looked around and wondered. It had come, and could not be refused—the gift of Death. At the grey pier-head the light upon the lighthouse gleamed its steady gleam of warning and salvation—not for them. The old church upon the hill-side gathered its graves about it in the dusk. '*Unto this, last*'—but not for them. For them, the trampling surges.

Yet there was the cottage on the cliff-top, and the rope ladder there, and perhaps some sailors out at sea.

'Shout!'

Norton shouted.

'No; it is no use deceiving ourselves, and no use maddening ourselves,' he said crisply—almost hardly.

He was close to Eleanor now; his hand upon her; and the wind shook out her hair across his face. His tone was low, and his voice trembled. 'And no use maddening ourselves,' he said again, but very tenderly. 'We are utterly lost. . . . Kiss me!'

'But'—with a gesture of recoil or hesitation—'I—I *love* you!' And then a gesture of ac-

ceptance, and a word besides. How her voice altered! 'Yes, yes! . . . we are to die.'

They were folded together in a wild embrace, which yet had, certainly, the sanction of her deepest being—had the full sanction of her soul.

Presently another shout, and it was *her* shout. 'Mother! Mother!'—with her childhood's need come back to her: the claim of all her early, half-forgotten days. And, in a wonderful and tragic minute, she realised, now, something besides her baffled love—the love that after all had neither filled her life nor wholly spoilt it. God! God!—not to go down into the darkness, with her two-and-twenty years!

And Norton understood that instinct, and so, to right and left, together and alone, came a mad effort, foiled, of course, by cliff and waters—by the cruel precipice and the advancing waves. The conquering waves!

Presently, the tide being higher, higher, and the wind stronger, and the black night come, there roared along that wild North coast the battle of the waters. The waves that shot into the shallow caverns of the cliff-side were thrown back again, in violent and blinding foam, to the excited seas. The drench, the darkness, the thunder of the seas!

With which the triumph—the seas that were first, or the seas that would follow? Human life at least was nothing; and, in the dark and heavy meeting of the trampling surges, the voice of the very wind was drowned.

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